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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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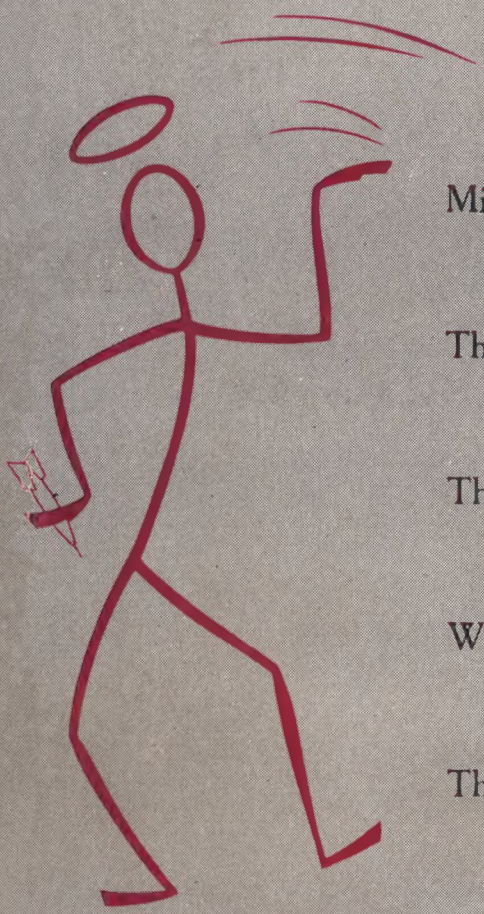
Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS



Mimic Murder
by CORNELL WOOLRICH

The Blue Scarab
by R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

The Guilty Man
by MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

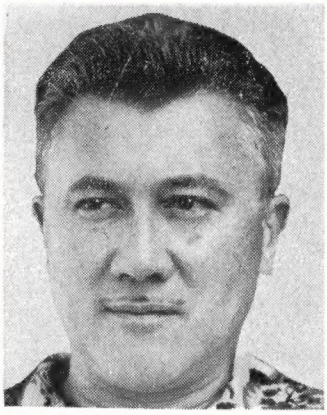
Witness to Murder
by WENZELL BROWN

The Unblemished Bootlegger
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

RAFFLES AND THE ANGRY BANKER
A NEW STORY by BARRY PEROWNE

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



THE YEAR 1907 was memorable for the birth of two characters who were destined to leave their indelible imprint on the world of crime fiction.

One of them, of course, was myself—and it may be interesting to note in passing that the same birth day (though in different years) was shared with me by Florence Nightingale and Philip Wylie. And let the astrologers explain that.

The other was John Thorndyke, the fictional brain-son of R. Austin Freeman, who made his début that year in THE RED THUMB MARK. Historically, this was 20 years after Sherlock Holmes first appeared in A STUDY IN SCARLET, and in fact 13 or 14 years after Holmes died for the first time in THE MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (two equally authoritative bibliographies give these conflicting dates). Therefore it must be admitted that but for the success of Holmes, Thorndyke might never have existed. But, as most people know, Conan Doyle explained away his hero's first demise and revived him in 1917, and continued his case book into the late 20's: the Thorndyke stories went steadily on beyond that, into the early 30's: thus, Thorndyke and Holmes were truly contemporary, and someone should really have introduced them.

The important difference is that Thorndyke was, I think, the first genuinely scientific detective of fiction. Holmes's famous monographs on cigarette ash and so forth were strictly hot air, for all the evidence we have; but Thorndyke's science was always authentic and carefully documented. As you read THE BLUE SCARAB, remembering these dates, I think you'll be amazed at how much more modern it seems than even the later Sherlocks.

I also can't resist quoting from the author's own footnote on his creation: *As he was a man of acute intellect and sound judgment, I decided to keep him free from eccentricities, such as are usually associated with an ill-balanced mind, and to endow him with the dignity of presence, appearance, and manner appropriate to his high professional and social standing. Especially I decided to keep him perfectly sane and normal.*

A precept which might profitably have been studied by certain modern writers whom you will never meet in this magazine, which likes the humane touch of Wenzell Brown's new novelette WITNESS TO MURDER and the healthy larcenousness of Raffles in his latest adventure—to say nothing of the Saint's dignified, sane, and normal brigandage.

Leslie Charteris

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THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, Vol. 10, No. 1. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 320 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 1, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y.
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raffles and the angry banker

by . . . Barry Perowne

He was going to give them a touch of the spur. Whoever won the Derby, would win control of the Bodegas.

IN THE noon sunshine of a blazing Saturday, a polo match had just finished. The dust was subsiding on the field used by the Gibraltar garrison. Near a clump of eucalyptus trees, the only shade in sight, the players were dismounting from their lathered ponies. Among the players was A. J. Raffles.

A mere spectator myself, I tilted my boater further forward to shade my eyes, and walked across the field to have a word with him.

Leased by the garrison, this field was at a village called Campamento, on the Spanish side of the frontier. Away to my right, the Rock itself, some two miles off, loomed up massive and leonine from the wide, blue bay. Nearby, to my left, was the shed used as a polo pavilion. Its shutters were propped up, lean-to fashion, and trays glittering with wine-glasses and bottles were being passed out.

The Gibraltar Skirmishers, for whom Raffles had been invited to pinch-hit in the place—and on the ponies—of a friend who had had a spill, were a mixed military and civilian side. The other team, call-

More than twenty years ago, a talented young writer named Barry Perowne took on the assignment of reviving Raffles, that "dean of delightful thieves," as Leslie Charteris calls him. Here is the latest adventure of the daring Mr. Raffles, first met with in E. W. Hornung's stories.

ed Los Bodegueros, was from the sherry town of Jerez.

Before the pavilion was a little gathering of Spanish ladies with *mantillas* and graceful fans, and of garrison ladies with sunshades. British officers in mufti, obligatory for officers when on this side of the frontier, were serving wine to the ladies. Appropriately enough, I noticed, the wine was sherry.

I swallowed with a dust-parched throat as I walked on by to the clump of eucalypti. Here, in the pungent shade, the ponies of both sides were tethered. Bits, bridles, bandages, yellow horse-blankets dangled from lines slung between the tree-trunks. The players were talking cheerfully. The Spanish grooms, blue-shirted and rope-sandalled, hissed busily as they wielded buckets and sponges. Unlike their officers, the cavalry troopers who brought the British ponies over from Gibraltar every morning, for exercising or for matches, wore uniform, shirt-sleeve order, and service caps. They, too, hissed as they worked on their charges.

"Hallo, there, Bunny," Raffles called to me. A groom was leading away his mount, a biggish gray. Raffles had taken off his pith helmet and was mopping his crisply dark hair, his tanned, keen face and brown arms with a towel. He grinned at me. "What a hiding we got!"

"I don't wonder at it," I said. "I never saw such ponies as these fellows in the sherry business brought with them."

"Los Bodegueros are a better side all round," Raffles said. "The Skirmishers were a scraped-together lot today, or they wouldn't have had to rope in a stray like me."

Actually, he had been invited to Gibraltar to play cricket, not polo. Every year, His Excellency the Governor asked out a few good English amateurs, to take part in the annual Cricket Week on the Rock. Raffles always accepted, for it was a good week, and, though no games-player myself, I usually came along for the trip.

He tossed the towel over a line. "Thanks, Bunny," he said, "for not minding our cancelling our passages home in the ship yesterday with the rest of the cricket crowd."

"I saw you were dead keen to stay on for this game," I said.

"Yes, I had a particular reason," said Raffles, and his tone and the glance he gave me made me faintly uneasy. "Notice that they're serving sherry, over there at the pavilion?" he said. "The sherry's a gift from the old gentleman in the wheel chair. See him?"

I saw that a wheel chair had been pushed round in front of the pavilion by two most attractive girls, one dark-haired and obviously Spanish, the other amber-haired and obviously English. In

the wheel chair sat a leathery, handsome, hawk-nosed old gentleman with iron-gray sideburns. He wore a white suit and white linen hat. He reached out to a passing tray, appropriated a glass of sherry. He moved it to and fro under his nose, took a sip, meditated on it frowningly, then nodded and tilted the glass to his lips. The two girls exchanged a smile.

"That," Raffles said softly, "is Bartholomew Finlay, owner of one of the great Jerez *bodegas*." He offered me a Sullivan from his cigarette-case. "You may have noticed that in the match this morning there was one outstanding player on each side? For Los Bodegueros, the outstanding player was Roberto Finlay. For the Skirmishers, the outstanding player was Alex Finlay. They're old Bart Finlay's adopted sons."

He touched a match to my cigarette.

"In Gibraltar, the other day," he said, "I heard something that intrigued me. I grabbed the chance to play in this polo match because I knew it'd bring me in touch with the people involved in an interesting situation. Bunny, Bart Finlay came to Spain as a boy of eighteen to study the art and mystery of sherry. He married a Spanish lady. From the small *solera* which was her dowry, he developed the delicious blends which have made his fortune. On the side, he also made a great reputation as an amateur rider. He won many races in Spain and on Gibraltar racecourse."

He dipped his cigarette to the match-flame in his cupped hands.

"Bart and his lady had no children of their own," he went on, "so they adopted two boys. For love of Spain, they adopted a boy born in Jerez, orphan of a Spanish cavalry trooper. For love of England, they adopted a boy born in Gibraltar, orphan of an English cavalry trooper."

I nodded, watching the old gentleman in the wheel chair before the pavilion.

"Bart's wife died," Raffles said. "They'd had everything in the world in common, including a love of fine horses. In memory of his lady, Bart Finlay, as grand an old sportsman as ever breathed, sponsored a five-furlong flat race, to be run annually on Gibraltar racecourse. The trophy is a golden bowl, and the race has become a virtual classic in these parts, and is known far and wide as the Sherry Bowl Derby. Bart made it open to amateur riders of Spanish birth, or British born in Gibraltar, or stationed there on military service."

"In other words," I said, "he made it open to—his adopted sons?"

"Precisely," Raffles said. "His dream, Bunny, was of Roberto or Alex—just kids at the time—one day putting the name he'd given them, the Finlay name, as a win-

ning rider, on the Golden Bowl which is in memory of the dearly loved woman who'd been a mother to them."

Behind us, in the shade, the players were talking, the grooms hissing.

"Roberto and Alex," Raffles said, "under old Bart's eye, have developed into the two finest amateur riders south of Madrid. They're also first-class fellows. Bart put them both into his business, starting at the bottom and doing all the various jobs, turn and turn about. At present, Roberto works at Jerez and plays polo for Los Bodegueros. Alex runs some part of the business which is handled from Gibraltar, and turns out for the Skirmishers. Now, recently, Bunny, they've both got engaged. Roberto's engaged to a Spanish girl, Inez Molina, daughter of Don Luis Molina, a racehorse trainer with a place just up in the hills here. Alex is engaged to an English girl, Joan Roskelly, daughter of a London banker, Sir George Roskelly."

"Are those the girls," I asked, "who're talking to Mr. Finlay, now?"

"Those are the girls," said Raffles. "Inez and Joan. Old Bart's delighted with them both. But there still remains just one thing in the world that old Bart wants to see Roberto or Alex pull off for him before he passes on, and the very intensity of his desire to see it is what's led old Bart, in a rash moment, to go too far—and trap himself."

"Trap himself?" I exclaimed.

"Neither Roberto nor Alex," Raffles said, "has yet managed to put the Finlay name, as a winning rider, on the Finlay Sherry Bowl. They've each been placed several times. Last year's race, I'm told, was a corker. Some British subaltern, on a horse called Lucky Lancer, nosed both Roberto and Alex out right on the post. And that's when old Bart, who was pretty wrought-up, made his mistake."

The polo field shimmered in the white glare. Beyond, the wide bay sparkled.

"Old Bart," Raffles said, "simply exploded. He thumped the arm of his wheel chair. 'A touch of the spur,' he said. 'That's what they need, a touch of the spur, and I'll give it to 'em. There's nothing to choose between 'em in the business. They're both good, keen boys, rivals but friends. They'd have got the business between 'em, as equal partners, when I'm gone, but perhaps there's something to be said for a business having just *one* boss. I'll probably live to see just one more race for my dear lady's Golden Bowl, and I want to see the Finlay name on it, as a winning rider, before I go. All right, fetch those boys here. I'm going to give 'em a touch of the spur. If one of 'em puts his name on the

Bowl next year, he gets a majority interest in the *bodegas,* t'other gets a minority.' "

Raffles dropped his cigarette-end, trod it out with a dusty riding-boot.

"He sent for Roberto and Alex," he said, "and he put it to them straight. Of course, it was rash, unbusinesslike, unwise. And when, soon after, the girls came into his life—Inez and Joan—he regretted the challenge he'd made. He's extremely fond of the girls, and he feels guilt-ridden because one of them, through no fault of her own, may be doomed all her life to be only the *junior* partner's wife. But old Bart, who's never in his life gone back on his word, is totally incapable of starting at this late date. So there it is, Bunny. The future of the *bodegas,* and of all the people involved, turns entirely on the result of the two-thirty race on Gibraltar racecourse next Saturday afternoon—the Sherry Bowl Derby. And—" He broke off sharply. "What the devil?"

We both looked over tensely at the pavilion. The echoes of the shot which had startled us volleyed in the arid hills sweeping up behind the eucalyptus trees. I thought for a second that the shot had come from the pavilion itself. But then, from the dust-deep lane which ran alongside the field on the pavilion side, there galloped out between the goal-posts a fine black horse with a rider in flying white robes, brandishing a long, archaic musket. The robed rider was a Moor.

In the center of the field, he reined-in his horse with a flourish that brought it up on its hind legs in a flurry of dust. Having thus rivetted the attention of everyone on the polo field, he sat his horse motionless, veiled almost to the eyes by a swathe of his head-dress —a striking figure against the wide, blue bay.

The British troopers, behind us under the trees, began to whoop and catcall, yelling, *"Ole,* Juzeed! Who give Lullaby for the three-thirty?"

The robed rider waved his musket at the troopers, as in acknowledgment of a faithful public's plaudits. Then he trotted his horse towards the pavilion.

"That's Juzeed, the tipster, Raffles," one of the Skirmisher players said, walking over to us. He was a wiry, blue-eyed, sandy-haired chap, deeply tanned. "Mallam Juzeed. He's giving himself a little advertisement before the races in Gibraltar this afternoon. There's a meeting every Saturday afternoon through the season. That's why we play Saturday polo games in the morning, so as to be free for the afternoon races. Juzeed's well-known in these parts. Comes from Tangier. Lives here at Campamento, now, in a shack in the hill, and makes his living on Gibraltar racecourse."

Raffles introduced me. "This is

Bunny Manders, Alex," he said. "Bunny—Alex Finlay." He added, "And here comes Roberto."

Old Bart Finlay's other adopted son was slender and dark, with fine eyes, and a horseman's steely handclasp. With a glance towards the pavilion, he said to Alex, "Looks as though the guv-nor is investing in Juzeed's five-bob sealed prophecy."

I saw that the robed tipster, leaning down from his saddle, was handing an envelope to the old gentleman in the wheel chair.

"Guv'nor's not going to the races this afternoon," Alex said. "He must have asked Juzeed for his special for—the two-thirty next Saturday."

At this mention of the race for the Golden Bowl in memory of the woman who had been a mother to them both, there passed between the blue-eyed Alex and the dark-eyed Roberto, brothers by adoption, a complex look. There was in it familiarity and affection, yet at the same time so cool and level an appraisal, as of adversaries when the swords cross, that I felt a tingle of premonition.

Over all the ground, a queer hush had fallen. Looking across at the pavilion, I saw that the old man in the wheel chair was opening with gnarled hands the tipster's envelope. Joan and Inez, one each side of him, and the groups before the pavilion, all were still, watching Bart Finlay as he studied the slip of paper from the envelope. Under the eucalyptus trees, the ponies munched, and the crickets seethed dryly in the heat-shimmer.

The old man tucked the paper back into the envelope. I heard his voice clearly as he looked up with an impassive face at the veiled rider.

"*Gracias,* Juzeed," said Bartholomew Finlay.

The Moor raised his musket above his head, in salute, and, wheeling his horse, cantered off down the lane to the village.

"Let's join the ladies," said Roberto Finlay.

"Let's," Alex Finlay agreed. "And, Raffles—you and Manders will be coming over, tonight, to join the house party at the guv'nor's place. That's understood."

This was the first I had heard of our going to stay at Mr. Finlay's place but I had no chance to question Raffles on the point until some half-hour or so later, when we were in a public-hire *coche,* with a somewhat dilapidated canopy and an equally dilapidated horse, jogging along the road to the frontier at La Linea.

On the road was a whole stream of assorted carriages, diligences, riders on horse or mule-back—the Saturday afternoon crowd headed for Gibraltar racecourse. Here and there in the stream walked a blanketed racehorse, led by a stable lad, though I imagined that most of the after-

noon's runners would have been taken over to Gibraltar earlier in the day.

I asked Raffles what was all this about our joining Mr. Finlay's house party.

"Why, yes, Bunny," said Raffles. "The Cricket Week's over. We mustn't outstay our welcome as guests in the billets provided for the visiting players—and their friends. Between chukkas, this morning, Alex Finlay invited me to join his father's house party. I said you were with me, and he said to bring you along. I accepted."

The *coche* ground along on iron-shod wheels.

"Old Bart used to live at Jerez," Raffles said, "but as he's under the doctor these days, and has an English doctor practicing in Gibraltar, he's settled at Campamento, to be handy. His place, the Hacienda Ysabel, is quite near the polo field. Alex is staying there until after the race next Saturday. Joan Roskelly's staying there, and so is her father, Sir George, who's come out from England with the horse which Alex'll be riding in the Sherry Bowl Derby."

"He'll be riding his future father-in-law's horse?" I said.

"Just so," said Raffles. "As a banker, Sir George disapproves of racing—on principle. But he disapproves even more strongly—on principle—of his future son-in-law being for the rest of his life only a *junior* partner in the Finlay sherry business. Sir George bitterly deplores, I'm told, old Bart Finlay's folly in mixing business with racing in the way he has. In the circumstances, Sir George's natural instinct—as a banker—is to reduce the hazard as far as possible. So, quite against his principle, he's registered his colors, and brought out from England, for Alex to ride, a horse called Master Primrose. It's won some good races back home, so Sir George had to pay through the nose for it. Master Primrose is now in the hands of a Gibraltarian trainer, a Mr. Abremis, who trains at Campamento."

Dust floated in on us. The *coche* trundled along over potholes. Beneath a low parapet that edged the road on the right, the lazy sea sucked and sweltered, dazzling.

"Are Roberto and Inez in Mr. Finlay's house party?" I asked.

"No," Raffles said. "As I told you, Inez's father, Don Luis Molina is a trainer with a place in the hills behind the polo ground. Inez lives with her father, and Roberto's staying there with them because the horse he'll be riding in the Sherry Bowl race—a Spanish horse called San Roque—is owned and trained by Don Luis. He's had a succession of bad seasons, I hear, and badly needs to win with San Roque. But Sir George's English horse, Master Primrose, is tough opposition."

"So each of the brothers by adoption, Roberto and Alex," I said thoughtfully, "will be riding the horse of his future father-in-law."

I was meditating on the potentialities of the situation when our *coche* came to a standstill. Looking out under the canopy, I saw that we had reached the frontier. We had become jammed in the raceday queue of vehicles and riders inching along in the blinding sunshine towards the archway through a square, white building, the *Aduana* or customs house, which flew the Spanish flag.

Deeming it quicker to walk, we paid off our driver and proceeded, afoot, to the head of the queue. Here the outlandish figure of the tipster, Mallam Juzeed, swathed almost to the eyes in his flowing white robes, was entering the arch on his fine black horse. Behind him, the long line of British troopers, returning from Campamento, was strung out, each man mounted on a yellow-blanketed polo pony and leading a couple of others. They were pulling the tipster's leg.

"Be a sport, Juzeed," they were shouting, with accompanying whistles and catcalls. "We're only poor soldier blokes. What's your nap for this aft'noon?"

The *carabineros,* in their gray-green uniforms with slung carbines, also were grinning and calling in Spanish for a hot tip, as with jerks of the thumb they motioned the obviously familiar and privileged figure of the veiled tipster to pass on through. An official eye was run cursorily along the line of troopers, then they, too, were thumbed through. We in our turn received the sanction of the thumb-in-office and, walking through the sultry and tawny shade under the echoing archway, emerged into the sun-glare over the scorched, flat expanse of the neutral territory.

Along the eight hundred yards of straight, dust-white road to the British gate, under the towering precipice called Rock Gun, streamed the line of racegoers. Juzeed, trotting his black horse, already was far ahead.

"A picturesque fellow, Bunny," Raffles said, as we walked on with the perspiring crowd. "I wonder just what horse he tipped for the Sherry Bowl Derby, in the sealed prophecy he sold old Bart Finlay?"

I wondered, too.

We collected our baggage from the cricket billets in Bombhouse Lane, returned to Campamento to join Mr. Bartholomew Finlay's house party at the Hacienda Ysabel. And on the Monday morning I saw Sir George Roskelly's horse, Master Primrose, for the first time.

It was just after dawn on Campamento sands. I was standing with Raffles, Sir George Roskelly and his amber-haired daughter Joan, and Master Prim-

rose's trainer, Mr. Abremis. The tide was out. The firm, wide sands swept in a great arc round the bay. Sea and sky had the cool radiance of mother-of-pearl.

The five of us had binoculars glued to our eyes. Framed in my binoculars was a little group of four horses galloping flat out, at the sea's marge, in our direction. Suddenly I saw Alex Finlay, on Master Primrose, give the horse his head, and the beautiful lemon-roan left the others behind as though they had been standing still.

When we lowered our binoculars, Mr. Abremis was smiling, Sir George Roskelly was looking satisfied in a grim kind of way. He was a rather grim kind of man, ruggedly built and gimlet-eyed; as a banker, he was one I should not lightly have approached for an overdraft.

"You look troubled, Miss Joan," Raffles said.

She looked at him with the most beautiful dark-gray eyes I ever had seen. "I want Alex to win, of course," she said, "but—it seems all wrong that so much should be at stake, between him and Roberto, on a single race."

"Totally wrong," said Sir George. He closed his binocular-case with a decisive snap. "However," he said grimly, "we shall see what we shall see."

At lunchtime, Inez and Roberto turned up. During the meal the race was not mentioned. This, I judged, was in deference to old Bart. Very properly, his attitude to his adopted sons, in the matter of the Sherry Bowl Derby, was one of iron neutrality. He would not hear one word about it.

After lunch, Roberto invited Raffles and myself to see his mount, San Roque. Accordingly, at daybreak the following morning we rode up, on a couple of horses from old Bart's stables, to Don Luis Molina's place, in the hills behind the polo ground.

The Cortijo Molina proved to be a lonely white farmhouse with a very good though dusty gallops nearby. At the gallops, Inez and her father awaited us. Don Luis was a tall, quiet-voiced man. His saddle-dark, handsome, haggard face was shaded by a Cordoba hat. He pointed to five horses in the distance, galloping towards us.

I raised my binoculars. The Spanish horse, San Roque, which Roberto Finlay was riding, was a gray. It looked to me on the small side, compared with the English horse, Master Primrose. Suddenly, however, Roberto gave San Roque his head, and the beautiful gray left the other horses behind as though they had been standing still.

We lowered our binoculars. Don Luis had an air of quiet confidence.

"You look troubled, Señorita Inez," Raffles said.

She looked at him with the most beautiful brown eyes I ever

had seen. "Ah, Señor Raffles," she said, "I want Roberto to win, of course, but I think it wrong, wrong, *wrong* that so much should be at stake, between him and Alex, on a single race."

"Quite wrong," said Don Luis. He closed his binocular-case gently. "However," he said, "we must hope for the best."

Thoughtfully, Raffles and I rode back down the dusty track to Campamento.

To this village, horses were the breath of life. Jockeys who came from all over Spain to ride at Gibraltar made Campamento their headquarters. A *café* called Los Tres Hermanos was the snuggery of the racing crowd. Most evenings, Alex Finlay, Raffles and myself strolled up after dinner to Los Tres Hermanos for a game of billiards.

The place was smoky, noisy, crowded with rough customers. Juzeed, the tipster, usually was there, sitting alone in the aura of mystery he cultivated, veiled almost to the eyes, but with his ears standing out like bat's wings to catch items of racing gossip relevant to his purpose as a professional prophet.

Through a bead-curtained archway, two steps led down into the billiard-room. Instead of the bullfight posters usual in Spanish *cafés,* paintings of racehorses hung on the whitewashed walls.

On the Friday evening before the Sherry Bowl Derby, Raffles and I happened to be at Los Tres Hermanos on our own. Alex had gone off for an eve-of-race conference with Master Primrose's trainer, Mr. Abremis. Raffles was playing billiards with a Madrid jockey, and I was marking for them and thinking about the pre-race sherry gathering at which we all were bidden, by old Bart Finlay, to be present at eleven-thirty next morning, on the terrace of the Hacienda Ysabel.

Mechanically, I pushed along the spot-marker as Raffles—he and I alone were in evening dress—clicked up the cannons. He had scored thirty-six, a nice break on a pocketless Spanish table where a cannon counted only one. There was money on the game, and I was glad to see him pause to chalk his cue before continuing. At that moment, the din of hoarse voices in the outer room fell abruptly silent. There was a scrape of chairs being pushed back, as though dumbfounded men were rising to their feet. I knew at once that an inconceivable thing must have happened—a woman had entered Los Tres Hermanos.

Sure enough, the bead curtain was swept aside, and there in the archway, her hair shining amber and her face very pale, stood Joan Roskelly.

"Mr. Raffles," she said, in a strange, taut tone, "may I have a word with you?"

Raffles laid down his cue, excused himself to the jockey. He

mounted the two steps, cupped a hand under the girl's arm. "Miss Joan," he said, concerned, "this is no place for you. Let's go outside."

The strings of the bead curtain swayed together, clicking, behind them. I was conscious of my heart thumping. I knew that something extraordinary must have happened to bring Joan here. However, I had not been asked for, so I thought it tactful not to follow them out immediately. The jockey urged me to take Raffles' place, and I did so, but my mind was not on it and I immediately miscued, in due course lost the game, and was obliged to pay up.

I hurried back through the moonlight, and the seething of crickets, to the Hacienda Ysabel. I looked into the *sala.* Sir George Roskelly, and Mr. Finlay in his wheel chair, were playing chess and sharing a bottle of very old, dark, after-dinner sherry from the Finlay *bodegas.* There was no sign of Joan or Raffles. I ran up the stairs two at a time to take a look into Raffles' bedroom.

He was there. He was pacing restlessly up and down, smoking a Sullivan. He looked at me sharply. "Close the door, Bunny," he said.

I did so, and turned to him. "What's wrong?" I said. "What's happened?"

"You know I told you," he said, "that I'd heard that Inez's father, Don Luis, had had a few bad seasons? Well, apparently he's in debt as a result—mainly to one creditor, here locally. I've just heard that the creditor has launched some sort of legal proceedings, and he's obtained an injunction restraining Don Luis, pending the hearing next week, from removing any part of his property from Spanish soil. His property includes—in fact, chiefly consists of—his horses. Roberto's mount, San Roque, will not be permitted to pass through the *Aduana* tomorrow, to Gibraltar racecourse, to run in the Sherry Bowl Derby."

I stared at him. Lamplight in the room seemed to shine with a still and sinister brilliance. Raffles' face was hard.

"The *Aduana* staff," he said, "know San Roque, which has often raced in Gibraltar, well by sight. They've been warned to block any attempt to take the horse through. Now, then. Inez rode down this evening and told Joan about the service of the injunction. Joan is in an awful state about it. She tells me she's morally certain it's her father's doing. He must have heard about these debts of Don Luis's, and she says Sir George has been making mysterious visits to a local landowner here. That landowner, Bunny, is the creditor who's now taken these proceedings."

"Sir George Roskelly put him up to it?" I exclaimed.

"Joan's certain of it," Raffles

said. "She says that, as a banker, he's disapproved bitterly, all along, of the inequitable and unbusiness like action of old Bart in putting a great concern to the hazard of a horse-race. Sir George has been doing his damnedest, all along, to reduce the hazard, in favor of his own future son-in-law, Alex. By this little coup, of course, he thinks he's reduced it virtually to zero."

He crushed out his cigarette in an ashtray.

"Joan, of course," he said, "wants her beloved Alex to win —but not in this way, businesslike as it well may be. Her first instinct was to tackle her father, but he's a hard man, and she knew she'd get no change out of him. Then she thought of going to old Bart, but she knows he's so adamantly neutral that you've only to say the word 'race' to him and he'll trundle his wheel chair straight out of the room. She thought of going to Alex—who's in bed and asleep, as he's riding tomorrow—but she's ashamed to tell him of this doing of her father. She desperately needed advice, so she ran to a fellow-countryman who happened to be handy—me."

"Well, but it's obvious," I said —"nothing can be done."

"I wouldn't say that," Raffles said. He took another cigarette from his case. "Bunny, the Spanish writ doesn't run on the other side of the neutral territory, and cannot stop San Roque racing if once the horse reaches Gibraltar."

He felt for his matches.

"I've had a talk with both girls," he said, "and Inez has now gone back home to the Cortijo Molina. Roberto is going to Gibraltar early in the morning, to see if he can arrange to ride for some other owner with a Sherry Bowl entry. Compared with San Roque or Master Primrose, of course, it could be only some rank outsider. Now, I've told Inez to get Roberto to take Don Luis with him, to advise about another mount. Roberto is also to contrive that Don Luis doesn't scratch San Roque till the last possible moment. I think I impressed Inez enough to make sure that she and Roberto will do what I want. Now, then —here's what I want *you* to do—"

"Me?" I gasped.

He set his cigarette between his lips, took out his wallet. "First," he said, "I want you stick tight with Sir George tomorrow, till you reach the racecourse. Then I want you to take this money—our joint capital, old boy—and slap it on San Roque to win. If the injunction's become rumored round, you should get good odds."

"In heaven's name," I said, taking the money, "what do you propose to do?"

He lighted his Sullivan, and I saw the gray gleam in his eyes as he shook out the match.

"I propose to steal the racehorse San Roque, and spirit it

through the *Aduana* tomorrow, to Gibraltar racecourse," said A. J. Raffles.

So outrageous and impossible did this seem to me that I saw no alternative but to assert myself, there and then, and veto the project. Before I could speak, however, he took me by the arm and, steering me firmly from his bedroom, shut the door in my face.

I slept hardly a wink. It was not as though it were some piffling diamond, or half-brick of hashish, that Raffles proposed to spirit through the *Aduana.* It was a horse. A celebrated horse. A stolen horse, at that! I tossed and turned. As the first hint of dawn paled my window, I rose, resolved to go to him and make one last appeal to reason.

I opened my door. Alex Finlay was passing along the landing. He carried a primrose silk racing jacket and cap, the newly registered colors of Sir George Roskelly. Alex grinned at me.

" 'Morning, Manders," he said. "This is the day. Senior partner all my life, or junior partner all my life, and merit be damned? I'll know today. Roberto and I are excused from the guv'nor's sherry gathering at eleven-thirty, but Abremis'll be there. I shall go with the stable lads who'll walk Master Primrose over to Gibraltar presently."

"Good luck, Finlay," I said.

I looked into Raffles' room. He was not there. My mind a tumult of surmises, I shaved with my door ajar so that I could watch for Sir George. I dressed in riding-kit, for he always rode in a grim, joyless way every morning, and my orders were to stick to him. Presently I heard the emphatic tread of the banker on the landing. I nipped out to accost him.

"Ah, Sir George," I said. "Riding, I see. Mind if I join you?"

He gave a surly kind of before-breakfast grunt, which I chose to construe as a charmed concurrence, and I walked along brightly at his side, down to the stables. Try as I did to enchant the banker with my conversation, as we rode on the sands, I could get nothing but grunts out of him, and even his grunts were infrequent. He seemed preoccupied.

Luckily, both Raffles and I had brought out pretty full wardrobes with us for the Cricket Week, because of Government House garden parties and so forth. So that when I went out on to the terrace of the Hacienda Ysabel at eleven-thirty, for old Bart's pre-race sherry gathering, I was properly turned out for racing, gray topper and all.

So was Sir George Roskelly, already on the terrace with Joan. Glasses, and sherry bottles that ran the whole gamut of the Finlay range, were set out on a wheeled trolley, together with an appetizing assortment of *picaduras,* or titbits.

The creaking of a wheel chair sounded as old Bart propelled himself out on to the terrace. He still wore his white suit and white linen hat, despite the fact that he was going racing. Indeed, his personal vehicle, a kind of dray adapted to take his wheel chair, waited on the drive in the sunshine, as did also the high-slung carriage with red-tasselled white canopy that was to transport the rest of us.

"Where's everybody?" said old Bart. "Where are Inez and Don Luis? Where's Abremis? Where's that cricketin' feller Raffles? Roberto and Alex I excused, but where are the rest of 'em?" His tone changed as a cob came trotting up the drive. "Here's Abremis, anyway," he said, and, as Master Primrose's Gibraltarian trainer dismounted and came up the terrace steps, old Bart demanded, "What are *you* lookin' so pensive about, Mr. Abremis?"

"Why, Mr. Finlay," said the trainer, "my way here brings me through the village, as you know, and I just heard a bit of news that touches on the race this afternoon—"

He broke off as old Bart spun his wheel chair round violently and trundled himself straight back into the house.

"You mustn't speak to Mr. Finlay about the race, Mr. Abremis," Sir George said. "Anything amiss?"

The trainer proceeded to tell us that he had just heard that an injunction had been served overnight on Don Luis Molina. Sir George listened with a wooden expression. But as the trainer went on, Sir George's expression began to change.

"A Madrid jockey who hangs round Los Tres Hermanos stopped me with the news," the trainer said. "He also told me that it's all over the village that San Roque's vanished—been spirited away out of his stall at the Cortijo Molina within the past hour or so."

My heart gave a great thump. Raffles had been busy.

"What do you mean—spirited away?" Sir George demanded. He had flushed brick-red. "Are you suggesting, Mr. Abremis, that Don Luis Molina would have the everlasting crust to ignore an injunction and try to slip that horse through to Gibraltar?"

"Don Luis would never do that, Sir George," said Abremis. "I'm sure he can know nothing about this business. I'm told he went to Gibraltar very early this morning with Mr. Roberto, leaving Miss Inez in charge at the Cortijo. No, sir, there's some unknown hand at work. The horse has been stolen—maybe by some punter with a big bet at stake on San Roque's running in the Sherry Bowl Derby."

"But, manalive," Sir George said, "suppose some unknown hand, as you call him, got the

horse by some miracle through the *Aduana,* would Don Luis dare race the horse?"

"The Spanish writ doesn't run on the other side of the neutral territory," Abremis said. "But as a matter of honor, and to protect his own best interests, if his horse were to turn up on Gibraltar racecourse Don Luis would have to bring it back into Spain again immediately. Well—almost immediately."

"What d'you mean—almost?" Sir George barked.

"Candidly," said the trainer, "if I was in Don Luis's shoes, and my horse miraculously turned up on the course, and I hadn't yet scratched it, I think I'd decide I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and I'd race the horse, and be damned, before I brought it back into Spain."

"Great heaven!" said Sir George Roskelly.

"This unknown hand," Abremis said thoughtfully. "His real problem, as I see it, would be not so much the actual theft of the horse as getting it through the *Aduana.* And that brings me to another queer thing the Madrid jockey told me. I've been thinking it over, riding here, and it looks suggestive to me. You know Juzeed, the tipster? He's got a shack in the hills nearby and he lets that very good black horse of his crop on the hillside, with a long tether. Well, the jockey told me that Juzeed was running all round the village just now, asking if his horse had strayed down there. Seems it'd pulled its tether-peg and wandered off. No one had seen it, so he went off back up to scour the hills. Now, I can't help thinking to myself that if, while Juzeed was traipsing round looking for his horse, this unknown hand was to slip into Juzeed's shack and borrow some of those robes he veils himself up in—"

"His only chance!" Sir George said thickly. "You've hit it, Mr. Abremis!" He swung round, ran down the steps, ducked into the canopied carriage. "The *Aduana!*" he shouted to the driver on the box. "Drive like the devil!"

In the nick of time, I recollected that my orders were to stick with Sir George. I raced down the steps, ducked into the carriage, then gave Joan a hand as she joined us when the carriage already was moving.

With the canopy swaying, the red tassels dancing crazily, the carriage spanked along the now familiar road to the frontier. I sat facing Joan and Sir George, my back to the driver on his elevated box. He kept his whip cracking. So frequent were the potholes that the three of us in the hot shade under the canopy were tossed about continually on the holland-covered seats. There was no chance to speak a word. Miss Joan lost her hat overboard. Hard

by, the sea heaved lazily, and glittered.

Soon we got involved with the raceday crowd. It was four times that of the previous Saturday. From all the long, dust-white roads which threaded Andalusia, home of the sherry grape, racegoers were converging upon the frontier, and Gibraltar beyond, for the Sherry Bowl Derby.

Nearing the *Aduana,* our carriage came to a standstill, caught in the crush piled up before the bottleneck. Sir George sprang out. I jumped out after him, gave Joan a hand to alight. Sir George, looking anxiously towards the head of the queue, shouted in sudden triumph, "There he is! We're in time!"

In the very act of entering the tawny shadows of the archway was a white-robed figure mounted on a black horse.

Sir George, holding on his gray topper with one hand, his binocular-case bouncing on its strap, ran towards the head of the queue, shouting in indifferent Spanish, "Stop that man! *Carabineros,* stop that man!"

I followed in haste, my head spinning with surmise and dread, and Joan running beside me, holding on to my arm.

Carabineros closed round the man muffled in the white robes. On his horse, he was led off to one side, under the archway.

"The man's an impostor," shouted Sir George. "Get him off his horse. He's no more Juzeed the tipster than that horse is the tipster's horse. It's Don Luis Molina's gray, San Roque, and has been treated with a dye, which would dry almost instantaneously in this hot sunshine. Arrest this man, and bring water, turpentine, spirit—whatever's necessary to swab the horse off."

A *carabinero* turned to the white-robed figure. With a premonition approaching almost a sense of sick collapse, I saw the officer's hand go out. He plucked away the swathe of head-dress which veiled the robed man almost to the eyes. To my stupefaction, the bewildered face revealed was that of a middle-aged Moor.

"This is Mallam Juzeed," the officer told Sir George. "A harmless fellow."

"Harmless?" Sir George roared. "He's in the conspiracy. Must be. This horse is San Roque, and I insist that all this dye filth be swabbed off."

The officer gave some orders. Several men ran for the necessary materials. The officer turned in a fury on the others who were clustering round with eager curiosity.

"What are you doing?" the officer snapped. "Get that crowd moving through!"

Waiting to pass through the arch were the British troopers with the long string of polo ponies returning from the usual morning exercise at Campamento. A *carabinero* gave the troopers a cursory

glance and a jerk of the thumb-in-office, his eyes returning instantly to the fascinating operations now taking place on the tipster's horse.

Indeed, Juzeed and his suspect horse were the cynosure of all eyes as the sudden clinking of the ponies' hooves on the flagstones echoed back from the arch overhead with a hollow, multifarious clatter. The cheerful troopers shouted chaff and advice to Juzeed as the yellow-blanketed ponies filed by at a walk.

Whether it was the sight of the ponies that galvanized my memory, I did not know. At all events, a significant recollection flashed into my mind. Namely, that one of the mounts Raffles had ridden in the match last Saturday had been a gray, on the large side for a polo pony, whereas San Roque was a gray that was on the small side for a racehorse.

I did not breathe as, out of the corner of my eye, I watched the file of ponies for a gray. There was one about midway of the file. It was yellow-blanketed, ridden, with a lead pony to either side of it. I slid my glance up the dusty boots and fatigue uniform of the trooper to the tanned face shadowed by the peak of a service cap.

I was looking at A. J. Raffles, on San Roque. Shouting chaff at Juzeed, like the rest of the troopers, he gave me a wink.

The blood rushed into my head as the string of ponies passed out of the shadow of the arch into the vibrant glare of the sun over the neutral territory, while the *carabineros* sloshed and swabbed away busily, the focus of all attention, at the tipster's horse, which obstinately remained as black as a horse very well could be.

It was some considerable time before Sir George Roskelly could be convinced of the tipster's innocence and of the integrity of his horse's pigmentation. To his credit, the banker then apologized handsomely, and pressed ten sovereigns into the palm of the aggrieved prophet.

"I jumped to a mistaken conclusion," said Sir George, to Joan and myself, as we joined, afoot, the race crowd streaming along the straight road across the neutral territory. "But it was the only possible way for the stolen horse to be spirited through the *Aduana*. It can never be got through, now."

We passed through the British gate and turned to the left on to the racecourse under the towering precipice of Rock Gun. Seldom could the little course have presented such a sight as it did on this day of the Sherry Bowl Derby. It seemed that all Andalusia was here, in the heat-dazzle, to see worked out the enigmatic destiny of the great Finlay *bodegas*.

I saw immediately that the rumor must have sped round that Don Luis Molina's San Roque was a doubtful runner, for the horse

was chalked up at forties on the bookies' blackboards. This after being level favorite with Sir George Roskelly's Master Primrose.

I excused myself to Joan and Sir George, and hurried to lay our joint capital, as instructed by Raffles, on San Roque to win. It seemed a frightful gamble to me, with Master Primrose in the race. However, I was just in time to get forties. Soon after, the odds against San Roque began significantly to shorten.

Two races were run, to the roar of the crowd, but I paid no attention. I was hunting high and low for Raffles. It was during the running of the 2:15, the Calpe Handicap, that I felt a touch on my arm, and a familiar voice said, "Well, Bunny?"

I spun round. Immaculate, gray-toppered, a pearl in his cravat, A. J. Raffles stood smiling at me.

"Easiest crib I ever had," he said, when I wrung his hand in congratulation. "This morning, very early, I came over to Gibraltar, bringing in a valise these togs I'm wearing now. I left the valise at the cricketers' billets. I then went to the cavalry lines and hunted out the troopers who take the polo ponies to and fro. You see, I'd remember that big gray I rode in the match last Saturday, and my whole plan stemmed from that. I told the troopers the whole situation and asked their help, promising to take all blame if we tripped up. I explained that I was engineering a diversion in the *Aduana* which I thought would cause it not to be noticed that one more trooper came back with the ponies at noon than went over with them earlier. Having co-opted the troopers, who were to bring over, under a horse-blanket, a uniform for me, I returned to Campamento and went to the *café,* Los Tres Hermanos, for a word with that Madrid jockey we played billiards with, the other night."

"Ah!" I exclaimed.

"Ah, indeed!" Raffles said. "You see, Bunny, I knew Mr. Abremis would be coming to old Bart's sherry gathering at eleven-thirty. I got the Madrid jockey to accost Abremis, tell him about the injunction, about the subsequent theft of San Roque—which, by the way, was child's play, with Inez and the stable lads turning a blind eye—and all that pure fairy-tale about Juzeed's horse having strayed. I felt pretty sure Abremis would repeat all this at the sherry gathering, and that Sir George would jump to the obvious conclusion and leg it for the *Aduana* to try to head off Juzeed before he got through. It worked like a charm. Sir George created exactly the uproar and diversion I needed."

He offered me his cigarette-case.

"As soon as I'd brought San Roque to the racecourse," he said,

"I popped along to the cricketers' billets in Bombhouse Lane, changed into these togs, then went to a lawyer in Main Street. There, for the first time in an ill-spent life, Bunny, I signed a written confession to a crime, the theft and illegal exportation from Spain of the racehorse San Roque—leaving out only the details that involve other people. The lawyer seemed rather tickled. When Don Luis takes San Roque back to Spain after the race, the lawyer'll go with him. With my confession, exonerating Don Luis from complicity, and the fact that the horse'll be so quickly back in Spain, the lawyer's quite certain he can square things as far as Don Luis is concerned. So now, Bunny—it's up to Roberto Finlay."

A roar from the crowd told us that the horses were going to the post, and we made our way up into the grandstand to join old Bart's party. The old gentleman had arrived, was there in his wheel chair. Sir George and Joan were there. Inez was there. All had binoculars to their eyes.

The horses were at the five-furlong post, on the far, righthand side of the course. Against the background of palms, eucalypti, feathery false-pepper trees, with the sea flashing silver in the further distance, the silks of the little knot of jockeys shimmered brilliantly in the heat-currents as the eight horses were coaxed up to the starting-wire. Through my binoculars, I saw the wire leap up like a streak of white lightning, and I heard from the crowd a thunderclap of sound which must have been audible in the *Aduana* and far beyond, almost to Jerez itself.

They were off for the Sherry Bowl Derby, the memorial of an old Englishman's undying love for his long lost lady of Spain.

Round the far rails poured the vivid blur of silks. I followed it, swinging my binoculars slowly round to the left. I saw the colors begin gradually to thin out, separate. In front were four horses, closely grouped, a big black horse slightly in the lead.

I heard old Bart Finlay mutter, "That's Lucky Lancer, with that subaltern up again, who pipped my boys last year. Come *on,* now! Touch o' the spur!"

With pounding hooves, the horses came sweeping lefthand round the rails. Alex Finlay, on Master Primrose, lay second to Lucky Lancer. A chestnut horse and the gray streak, San Roque, were neck-and-neck third, but Roberto Finlay, in the purple-and-gold of Don Luis Molina, was beginning to gain on the chestnut.

The horses came into the straight with Lucky Lancer still leading, on the rails, Master Primrose a half-length behind, San Roque coming up on the outside. The horses were pounding almost head-on into my binoculars, now. The sound of the crowd was like the sea's surge.

The three horses appeared to me to be dead level, Master Primrose in the center.

In the binoculars, I saw clearly the blue, cool, measuring glance Alex Finlay cast at the horse to either side of him. Suddenly his whip flicked. Master Primrose got his head past Lucky Lancer. But Roberto Finlay's whip stung San Roque in the same instant; and riding with shoulders, whips and clamping knees, the brothers by adoption swept past the post, to the sustained tumult of the crowd, with not a hair between their mounts as far as I could see, and Lucky Lancer, just a short head behind.

The roar of the crowd sank to an excited hum, then soared again to the greatest thunder yet, as the numbers went up: *Dead heat—Master Primrose, San Roque.*

I glanced round at old Bart Finlay. Joan and Inez had gone to him. Their arms were about his shoulders, in congratulation, sympathy and love. The old man had his hawk nose buried in a handkerchief. He blew a blare like a herald's trumpet.

"Damme, girlies," he said. "Excuse me, my dears. Damned old fool! But both of 'em—*both* of 'em! Know what Juzeed tipped in his sealed prophecy? Lucky Lancer. Hah, damn fool!" He shook his head, marvelling. "*Both* of 'em! I don't deserve it."

"With no desire to be unkind, Finlay," said Sir George, "candour compels me to agree with you. In view of the fortunate result of the race, I now feel free to tell you frankly that I so strongly disapproved of a horserace as a way of settling the future of a fine business, and so strongly felt that you yourself regretted the commitment you'd made, that I took such steps as were open to me to get the race, at least as far as your adopted sons were concerned, washed out altogether."

We all, including Raffles, looked at the rugged banker in astonishment.

"Inez," Sir George said, "forgive my saying that I learned of certain debts by which your father was temporarily embarrassed. After careful consideration, I went to his chief creditor and persuaded him to take certain proceedings. He was reluctant, said he knew his money would be all right eventually. But when I made him understand my motives, he agreed to do what I asked."

"Your motives, Father?" Joan said, in a strange tone. "What *were* they?"

"To ensure," said Sir George Roskelly, "that neither Roberto nor Alex should ride in the Sherry Bowl Derby."

I was bewildered. We all were. Never had I seen such an expression on Raffles' face.

"A banker," Sir George said, "sees perhaps rather more shrewdly into human nature than most men. I saw that Roberto and Alex

were energetic, ambitious fellows and keen rivals—but at the same time good friends, good sportsmen. I had not a shadow of doubt that if, by some extraneous misfortune, Roberto's mount, San Roque, were scratched from the Sherry Bowl Derby, then Alex, as soon as he heard of it, would immediately withdraw from the ride on Master Primrose. Thus the race would be washed out as far as the rash commitment made by Mr. Finlay was concerned, and he would be left free to decide the future disposition of the Finlay *bodegas* on a sound, businesslike basis of personal merit and the general good of the concern."

We all stood staring at the vindicated banker. Joan laughed suddenly, happily, in relief.

"All very well to laugh, my dear," Sir George said. "Some unmitigated scoundrel, for ends best known to himself, stole the horse, got it by some unimaginable chicanery through the *Aduana,* and knocked the foundation right out from under my maturely considered arrangements. I hesitate to think what harm might have been done, if it hadn't been for the lucky chance of the race ending as it did."

"More than I deserve," said old Bart Finlay. "You're sound and right, Roskelly, in everything you've said, I don't deny it. But, as things have turned out—" He smiled the tender smile of a very old man. "I wouldn't have it otherwise," he said. "Roberto and Alex will be equal partners, now, when I'm gone—I'll see to that. But they've done what I wanted, and I never want to see another race. *Both* of 'em! *Both* my adopted boys, the Spaniard and the Briton, have put the name I gave 'em on the Golden Bowl that's in memory of my dear lady who was a mother to the pair of 'em. No, no, Roskelly. I wouldn't have it any other way."

Raffles caught my eye. He jerked his head slightly. Unobtrusively, we slipped away from the group in the grandstand. We mingled with the crowd below.

"Mr. Raffles!" a voice called.

We turned. It was Joan. She held out both her hands to Raffles.

"Mr. Raffles," she said breathlessly, "I quite misunderstood my father's motives, and thereby misled you. I'm so very ashamed." She looked radiant. "Inez and I *do* hope that you and Mr. Manders will come to our weddings, which will be from the Hacienda Ysabel."

"I'm afraid, Miss Joan," Raffles said regretfully, "that Manders and I are unlikely to be visiting Spain again in the foreseeable future. But it goes without saying that we shall be with you all—in spirit."

He shook his head as we stood watching her, with her hair shining amber in the sun and a hand to her pretty skirts, go back up the grandstand steps. Raffles' expres-

sion was meditative, his half smile rueful and ironic.

"You know, Bunny," he said slowly, "there are good people and wicked in this world. That little group up there must be numbered, I think—and I particularly include Sir George Roskelly—among the good."

He chuckled suddenly and looked at me with the old vivacity dancing in his eyes.

"As two of the wicked, Bunny," he said, "so justly reproached for flourishing, let's go and collect our winnings. After that—what about a glass of sherry?" said A. J. Raffles.

WHO NICKED THE STICKS?

London's underworld teamed up with Scotland Yard, as we were going to press, in an angry search for the men who had "nicked the sticks from St. Anne's."

The candlesticks had been stolen from St. Anne's Anglican Church in colorful and cosmopolitan Soho, the thieves also smashing sacred ornaments and tossing a holy water font into a parking lot.

Soho was outraged.

The district's citizenry aren't above a bit of extra-legal activity themselves, but this was *far* beyond the pale.

As the appeal to find the thieves—and to find them first—passed from one "spieler" to another, Soho's semi-official spokesman, Newmarket Ned, was quoted as saying angrily: "Stealing from our own church—it's downright criminal!" Newmarket, who gets his name from the famous British racetrack, then added: "Those sticks are hotter than the crown jewels. There isn't a fence who'll look at 'em. It's a diabolical liberty. We draw the line at robbing churches—it's unlucky anyway. Whoever lifted those sticks on Dean Street is in for the biggest going over since that fight none of us saw."

This was a reference to a recent daylight street fight in which two prominent Soho citizens received stab wounds. Curiously enough there were no witnesses.

Everyone, in other words, was "hopping mad" and this meant everyone, *all* those who make up the cosmopolitan community that is Soho; there was immediate talk of "a whip-around"—a collection, to you who don't live in Soho.

the unblemished bootlegger

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Mr. Croon was always astute enough to avoid any direct tie-in with his own swindles. Until Simon decided to involve him.

MR. MELFORD CROON considered himself a very prosperous man. The brass plate outside his unassuming suite of offices in Gray's Inn Road described him somewhat vaguely as a "Financial Consultant"; and while it is true that the gilt-edged moguls of the city had never been known to seek his advice, there is no doubt that he flourished exceedingly.

Out of Mr. Croon's fertile financial genius emerged, for example the great Tin Salvage Trust. In circulars, advertisements, and statements to the Press, Mr. Croon raised his literary hands in horror at the appalling waste of tin that was going on day by day throughout the country. "Tins," of course, as understood in the British domestic vocabulary to mean the sepulchres of Heinz's 57 Varieties, the Crosse & Blackwell vegetable garden, or the Campbell soup kitchen, are made of thin sheet steel with the most economical possible plating of genuine tin; but nevertheless (Mr. Croon pointed out) tin was used. And

Let us cheerfully admit it as an editorial sin of omission: over the years, we have published quite a few stories in this magazine which featured a certain Peter Quentin, pal and part-time lieutenant of the Saint, without ever explaining how this friendship began. Herewith, belatedly, we give you the story in which they first met—and how long ago that was, you may deduce rather easily from other historical references in the text.

From: THE BRIGHTER BUCCANEER
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what happened to it? It was thrown away.

The garbage man removed it along with the other contents of the ashcan, and the municipal incinerators burnt it. And tin was a precious metal—not quite so valuable as gold and platinum, but not very far behind silver. Mr. Croon invited his readers to think of it. Hundreds of thousands of pounds being poured into garbage dumps and incinerators every day of the week from every kitchen in the land. Individually worthless "tins" which in the accumulation represented an enormous potential wealth.

The great Tin Salvage Trust was formed with a capital of nearly a quarter of a million to deal with the problem. Barrows would collect cans from door to door. Rag-and-bone men would lend their services. A vast refining and smelting plant would be built to recover the pure tin. Enormous dividends would be paid. The subscribers would grow rich overnight.

The subscribers did not grow rich overnight; but that was not Mr. Croon's fault. The Official Receiver reluctantly had to admit it, when the Trust went into liquidation eighteen months after it was formed. The regrettable capriciousness of fortune discovered and enlarged a fatal leak in the scheme; without quite knowing how it all happened, a couple of dazed promoters found themselves listening to sentences of penal servitude; and the creditors were glad to accept one shilling in the pound. Mr. Croon was overcome with grief—he said so in public—but he could not possibly be blamed for the failure. He had no connection whatever with the Trust, except as Financial Consultant—a post for which he received a merely nominal salary. It was all very sad.

In similar circumstances, Mr. Croon was overcome with grief at the failures of the great Rubber Waste Products Corporation, the Iron Workers' Benevolent Guild, the Small Investors' Co-operative Bank, and the Consolidated Albion Film Company. He had a hard and unprofitable life; and if his mansion flat in Hampstead, his Rolls Royce, his shoot in Scotland, his racing stable, and his house at Marlow helped to console him, it is quite certain that he needed them.

"A very suitable specimen for us to study," said Simon Templar.

The latest product of Mr. Croon's indomitable inventiveness was spread out on his knee. It took the form of a very artistically typewritten letter, which had been passed on to the Saint by a chance acquaintance.

Dear Sir,

As you cannot fail to be aware, a state of Prohibition exists at present in the United States of

America. This has led to a highly profitable trade in the forbidden alcoholic drinks between countries not so affected and the United States.

A considerable difference of opinion exists as to whether this traffic is morally justified. There can be no question, however, that from the standpoint of this country it cannot be legally attacked, nor that the profits, in proportion to the risk, are exceptionally attractive.

If you should desire further information on the subject I shall be pleased to supply it at the above address.

Yours faithfully,
Melford Croon.

Simon Templar called on Mr. Croon one morning by appointment; and the name he gave was not his own. He found Mr. Croon to be a portly and rather pale-faced man, with the flowing iron-gray mane of an impresario; and the information he gave—after a few particularly shrewd inquiries about his visitor's status and occupation—was very much what the Saint had expected.

"A friend of mine," said Mr. Croon—he never claimed personally to be the author of the schemes on which he gave Financial Consultations—"a friend of mine is interested in sending a cargo of wines and spirits to America. Naturally, the expenses are somewhat heavy. He has to charter a ship, engage a crew, purchase the cargo, and arrange to dispose of it on the other side. While he would prefer to find the whole of the money—and, of course, reap all the reward—he is unfortunately left short of about two thousand pounds."

"I see," said the Saint.

He saw much more than Mr. Croon told him, but he did not say so.

"This two thousand pounds," said Mr. Croon, "represents about one-fifth of the cost of the trip, and in order to complete his arrangements my friend is prepared to offer a quarter of his profits to anyone who will go into partnership with him. As he expects to make at least ten thousand pounds, you will see that there are not many speculations which offer such a liberal return."

If there was one role which Simon Templar could play better than any other, it was that of the kind of man whom financial consultants of every size and species dream that they may meet one day before they die. Mr. Croon's heart warmed towards him as Simon laid on the touches of his self-created character with a master's brush.

"A very charming man," thought the Saint as he paused on the pavement outside the building which housed Mr. Croon's offices.

Since at various stages of the interview Mr. Croon's effusive bonhomie had fairly bubbled with

invitations to lunch with Mr. Croon, dine with Mr. Croon, shoot with Mr. Croon, watch Mr. Croon's horses win at Goodwood with Mr. Croon, and spend week-ends with Mr. Croon at Mr. Croon's house on the river, the character which Simon Templar had been playing might have thought that the line of the Saint's lips were unduly cynical; but Simon was only thinking of his own mission in life.

He stood there with his walking cane swinging gently in his fingers, gazing at the very commonplace street scene with thoughtful blue eyes, and became aware that a young man with the physique of a pugilist was standing at his shoulder. Simon waited.

"Have you been to see Croon?" demanded the young man suddenly.

Simon looked around with a slight smile.

"Why ask?" he murmured. "You were outside Croon's room when I came out, and you followed me down the stairs."

"I just wondered."

The young man had a pleasantly ugly face with crinkly gray eyes that would have liked to be friendly; but he was very plainly nervous.

"Are you interested in bootlegging?" asked the Saint; and the young man stared at him grimly.

"Listen, I don't know if you're trying to be funny, but I'm not. I'm probably going to be arrested this afternoon. In the last month I've lost about five thousand pounds in Croon's schemes—and the money wasn't mine to lose. You can think what you like. I went up there to bash his face in before they get me, and I'm going back now for the same reason. But I saw you come out, and you didn't look like a crook. I thought I'd give you a word of warning. You can take it or leave it. Goodbye."

He turned off abruptly into the building, but Simon reached out and caught him by the elbow.

"Why not come and have some lunch first?" he suggested. "And let Croon have his. It'll be so much more fun punching him in the stomach when it's full of food."

He waved away the young man's objections and excuses without listening to them, hailed a taxi, and bundled him in. It was the kind of opportunity that the Saint lived for, and he would have had his way if he was compelled to kidnap his guest for the occasion. They lunched at a quiet restaurant in Soho; and in the persuasive warmth of half a litre of Antinori Chianti and the Saint's irresistible personality the young man told him what he knew of Mr. Melford Croon.

"I suppose I was a complete idiot—that's all. I met Croon through a man I used to see in the place where I always had lunch. It didn't occur to me that

it was all a put-up job, and I thought Croon was all right. I was fed to the teeth with sitting about in an office copying figures from one book to another, and Croon's stunts looked like a way out. I put three thousand quid into his Consolidated Albion Film Company: it was only on paper, and the way Croon talked about it made me think I'd never really be called on for the money. They were going to rent the World Features studio at Teddington—the place is still on the market. When Consolidated Albion went smash I had to find the money, and the only way I could get it was to borrow it out of the firm. Croon put the idea into my head, but— Oh, hell! It's easy enough to see how things have happened after the damage is done."

He had borrowed another two thousand pounds—without the cashier's knowledge—in the hope of retrieving the first loss. It had gone into a cargo of liquor destined for the thirsty States. Six weeks later Mr. Croon broke the news to him that the coastal patrols had captured the ship.

"And that's what'll happen to any other fool who puts money into Croon's bootlegging," said the young man bitterly. "He'll be told that the ship's sunk, or captured, or caught fire, or grown wings and flown away. He'll never see his money back. My God—to think of that slimy swab trying to be a bootlegger! Why, he told me once that the very sight of a ship made him feel sick, and he wouldn't cross the Channel for a thousand pounds."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked the Saint, and the young man shrugged.

"Go back and try to make him wish he'd never been born—as I told you. They're having an audit today at the office, and they can't help finding out what I've done. I stayed away—said I was ill. That's all there is to do."

Simon took out his checkbook and wrote a check for five thousand pounds.

"Whom shall I make it payable to?" he inquired, and his guest's eyes widened.

"My name's Peter Quentin. But I don't want any of your damned—"

"My dear chap, I shouldn't dream of offering you charity." Simon blotted the pink slip and scaled it across the table. "This little chat has been worth every penny of it. Besides, you don't want to go to penal servitude at your age. It isn't healthy. Now be a good fellow and dash back to your office—square things up as well as you can—"

The young man was staring at the name which was scribbled in the bottom right-hand corner of the paper.

"Is that name Simon Templar?"

The Saint nodded.

"You see, I shall get it all back," he said.

He went home with two definite conclusions as a result of his day's work and expenses: first, that Mr. Melford Croon was in every way as undesirable a citizen as he had thought, and second, that Mr. Melford Croon's contribution to the funds of righteousness was long overdue. Mr. Croon's account was, in fact, exactly five thousand pounds overdrawn; and that state of affairs could not be allowed to continue.

Nevertheless, it took the Saint twenty-four hours of intensive thought to devise a poetic retribution; and when the solution came to him it was so simple that he had to laugh.

Mr. Croon went down to his house on the river for the week end. He invariably spent his week ends there in the summer, driving out of London on the Friday afternoon and refreshing himself from his labors with three happy days of rural peace. Mr. Croon had an unexpected appetite for simple beauty and the works of nature: he was rarely so contented as when he was lying out in a deck-chair and spotless white flannels, directing his gardener's efforts at the flowerbeds, or sipping an iced Peter Dawson on his balcony while he watched supple young athletes propelling punts up and down the stream.

This week end was intended to be no exception to his usual custom. He arrived at Marlow in time for dinner, and prepared for an early night in anticipation of the tireless revels of a mixed company of his friends who were due to join him the next day. It was scarcely eleven o'clock when he dismissed his servant and mixed himself a final drink before going to bed.

He heard the front door bell ring, and rose from his armchair grudgingly. He had no idea who could be calling on him at that hour; and when he had opened the door and found that there was no one visible outside he was even more annoyed.

He returned to the sitting-room, and gulped down the remainder of his nightcap without noticing the bitter tang that had not been there when he poured it out. The taste came into his mouth after the liquid had been swallowed, and he grimaced. He started to walk towards the door, and the room spun around. He felt himself falling helplessly before he could cry out.

When he woke up, his first impression was that he had been buried alive. He was lying on a hard narrow surface, with one shoulder squeezed up against a wall on his left, and the ceiling seemed to be only a few inches above his head. Then his sight cleared a little, and he made out that he was in a bunk in a tiny unventilated compartment lighted by a single circular window. He struggled up on one elbow, and

groaned. His head was one reeling whirligig of aches, and he felt horribly sick.

Painfully he forced his mind back to his last period of consciousness. He remembered pouring out that last whiskey-and-soda—the ring at the front door—the bitter taste in the glass.... Then nothing but an infinity of empty blackness. . . . How long had he been unconscious? A day? Two days? A week? He had no means of telling.

With an agonizing effort he dragged himself off the bunk and staggered across the floor. It reared and swayed sickeningly under him, so that he could hardly keep his balance. His stomach was somersaulting nauseatingly inside him. Somehow he got over to the one round window: the pane was frosted over, but outside he could hear the splash of water and the shriek of wind. The explanation dawned on him dully—he was in a ship.

Mr. Croon's knees gave way under him, and he sank moaning to the floor. A spasm of sickness left him gasping in a clammy sweat. The air was stiflingly close, and there was a smell of oil in it which made it almost unbreathable. Stupidly, unbelievingly, he felt the floor vibrating to the distant rhythm of the engines. A ship! He'd been drugged—kidnapped—shanghaied! Even while he tried to convince himself that it could not be true, the floor heaved up again with the awful deliberateness of a seventh wave; and Mr. Croon heaved up with it. . . .

He never knew how he managed to crawl to the door between the paroxysms of torment that racked him with every movement of the vessel. After what seemed like hours he reached it, and found strength to try the handle. The door failed to budge. It was locked. He was a prisoner—and he was going to die. If he could have opened the door he would have crawled up to the deck and thrown himself into the sea. It would have been better than dying of that dreadful nausea that racked his whole body and made his head swim as if it were being spun on the axle of a dynamo.

He rolled on the floor and sobbed with helpless misery. In another hour of that weather he'd be dead. If he could have found a weapon he would have killed himself. He had never been able to stand the slightest movement of the water—and now he was a prisoner in a ship that must have been riding one of the worst storms in the history of navigation. The hopelessness of his position made him scream suddenly—scream like a trapped hare—before the ship slumped suckingly down into the trough of another seventh wave and left his stomach on the crest of it.

Minutes later—it seemed like centuries—a key turned in the

locked door, and a man came in. Through the bilious yellow mists that swirled over his eyes, Mr. Croon saw that he was tall and wiry, with a salt-tanned face and far-sighted twinkling blue eyes. His double-breasted jacket carried lines of dingy gold braid, and he balanced himself easily against the rolling of the vessel.

"Why, Mr. Croon—what's the matter?"

"I'm sick," sobbed Mr. Croon, and proceeded to prove it.

The officer picked him up and laid him on the bunk.

"Bless you, sir, this isn't anything to speak of. Just a bit of a blow—and quite a gentle one for the Atlantic."

Croon gasped feebly.

"Did you say the Atlantic?"

"Yes, sir. The Atlantic is the ocean we are on now, sir, and it'll be the same ocean all the way to Boston."

"I can't go to Boston," said Mr. Croon pathetically. "I'm going to die."

The officer pulled out a pipe and stuffed it with black tobacco. A cloud of rank smoke added itself to the smell of oil that was contributing to Croon's wretchedness.

"Lord, sir, you're not going to die!" said the officer cheerfully. "People who aren't used to it often get like this for the first two or three days. Though I must say, sir, you've taken a long time to wake up. I've never known a man be so long sleeping it off. That must have been a very good farewell party you had, sir."

"Damn you!" groaned the sick man weakly. "I wasn't drunk—I was drugged!"

The officer's mouth fell open.

"Drugged, Mr. Croon?"

"Yes, drugged!" The ship rolled on its beam ends, and Croon gave himself up for a full minute to his anguish. "Oh, don't argue about it! Take me home!"

"Well, sir, I'm afraid that's—"

"Fetch me the captain!"

"I am the captain, sir. Captain Bourne. You seem to have forgotten, sir. This is the *Christabel Jane,* eighteen hours out of Liverpool with a cargo of spirits for the United States. We don't usually take passengers, sir, but seeing that you were a friend of the owner, and you wanted to make the trip, why, of course we found you a berth."

Croon buried his face in his hands.

He had no more questions to ask. The main details of the conspiracy were plain enough. One of his victims had turned on him for revenge—or perhaps several of them had banded together for the purpose. He had been threatened often before. And somehow his terror of the sea had become known. It was poetic justice—to shanghai him on board a bootlegging ship and force him to take the journey of which he had cheated their investments.

"How much will you take to turn back?" he asked; and Captain Bourne shook his head.

"You still don't seem to understand, sir. There's ten thousand pounds' worth of spirits on board—at least, they'll be worth ten thousand pounds if we get them across safely—and I'd lose my job if I—"

"Damn your job!" said Melford Croon.

With trembling fingers he pulled out a checkbook and fountain pen. He scrawled a check for fifteen thousand pounds and held it out.

"Here you are. I'll buy your cargo. Give the owner his money and keep the change. Keep the cargo. I'll buy your whole damned ship. But take me back. D'you understand? Take me back—"

The ship lurched under him again, and he chocked. When the convulsion was over the captain was gone.

Presently a white-coated steward entered with a cup of steaming beef-tea. Croon looked at it and shuddered.

"Take it away," he wailed.

"The captain sent me with it, sir," explained the steward. "You must try to drink it, sir. It's the best thing in the world for the way you're feeling. Really, sir, you'll feel quite different after you've had it."

Croon put out a white, flabby hand. He managed to take a gulp of the hot soup; then another. It had a slightly bitter taste which seemed familiar. The cabin swam around him again, more dizzily than before, and his eyes closed in merciful drowsiness.

He opened them in his own bedroom. His servant was drawing back the curtains, and the sun was streaming in at the windows.

The memory of his nightmare made him feel sick again, and he clenched his teeth and swallowed desperately. But the floor underneath was quite steady. And then he remembered something else, and struggled up in the bed with an effort which threatened to overpower him with renewed nausea.

"Give me my checkbook," he rasped. "Quick—out of my coat pocket—"

He opened it frantically and stared at a blank stub with his face growing haggard.

"What's today?" he asked.

"This is Saturday, sir," answered the surprised valet.

"What time?"

"Eleven o'clock, sir. You said I wasn't to call you—"

But Mr. Melford Croon was clawing for the telephone at his bedside. In a few seconds he was through to his bank in London. They told him that his check had been cashed at ten.

Mr. Croon lay back on the pillows and tried to think out how it could have been done.

He even went so far as to tell his incredible story to Scotland

Yard, though he was not by nature inclined to attract the attention of the police. A methodical search was made in Lloyd's Register, but no mention of a ship called the *Christabel Jane* could be found.

Which was not surprising, for *Christabel Jane* was the name temporarily bestowed by Simon Templar on a dilapidated Thames tug which had wallowed very convincingly for a few hours in the gigantic tank at the World Features studio at Teddington for the filming of storm scenes at sea, which would undoubtedly have been a great asset to Mr. Croon's Consolidated Albion Film Company if the negotiations for the lease had been successful.

NEXT MONTH—

Flash Casey hunts a killer in
George Harmon Coxe's REWARD FOR SURVIVORS

A man returns from the dead in
E. Phillips Oppenheim's MAN FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

You meet beautiful Lotus Yuan in
Sax Rohmer's DEADLY PLOT OF MR. KO

A murderer is unmasked in
Dorothy Hughes' YOU KILLED MIRANDA

Simon Templar makes an ancient legend pay off in
Leslie Charteris' THE LOVELY SINNER

and

**We meet a killer who serves "God's children"
in his own particularly unpleasant way in**

THE PEARL OF DYING BOYS' REEF

A New Story by ADRIAN CONAN DOYLE

—in the SAINT

the blue scarab

by . . . R. Austin Freeman

MEDICO - LEGAL practice is largely concerned with crimes against the person, the details of which are often sordid, gruesome and unpleasant. Hence the curious and romantic case of the Blue Scarab (though really outside our specialty) came as somewhat of a relief. But to me it is of interest principally as illustrating two of those remarkable gifts which made my friend, Thorndyke, unique as an investigator: his uncanny power of picking out the one essential fact at a glance, and his capacity to produce, when required, inexhaustible stores of unexpected knowledge of the most out-of-the-way subjects.

It was late in the afternoon when Mr. James Blowgrave arrived, by appointment, at our chambers, accompanied by his daughter, a rather strikingly pretty girl of about twenty-two; and when we had mutually introduced ourselves, the consultation began without preamble.

"I didn't give any details in my letter to you," said Mr. Blowgrave. "I thought it better not to,

Everything stolen had been returned, everything except this scarab whose message had been called gibberish.

Great-grandfather Blowgrave and his brother had been privateers during the War with France. During their last cruise they had acquired a remarkable collection of jewels (how was uncertain) which later disappeared. With the death of the surviving brother, no clue remained except a cryptic letter and a scarab, its meaning obscure until Dr. Thorndyke entered the case.

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for fear you might decline the case. It is really a matter of a robbery, but not quite an ordinary robbery. There are some unusual and rather mysterious features in the case. And as the police hold out very little hope, I have come to ask if you will give me your opinion on the case and perhaps look into it for me. But first I had better tell you how the affair happened.

"The robbery occurred just a fortnight ago, about half-past nine o'clock in the evening. I was sitting in my study with my daughter, looking over some things that I had taken from a small deed-box, when a servant rushed in to tell us that one of the outbuildings was on fire. Now my study opens by a French window on the garden at the back, and, as the outbuilding was in a meadow at the side of the garden, I went out that way, leaving the French window open; but before going I hastily put the things back in the deed-box and locked it.

"The building—which I used partly as a lumber store and partly as a workshop—was well alight and the whole household was already on the spot, the boy working the pump and the two maids carrying the buckets and throwing water on the fire. My daughter and I joined the party and helped to carry the buckets and take out what goods we could reach from the burning building. But it was nearly half an hour before we got the fire completely extinguished, and then my daughter and I went to our rooms to wash and tidy ourselves up. We returned to the study together, and when I had shut the French window my daughter proposed that we should resume our interrupted occupation. Thereupon I took out of my pocket the key of the deed-box and turned to the cabinet on which the box always stood.

"But there was no deed-box there!

"For a moment I thought I must have moved it, and cast my eyes round the room in search of it. But it was nowhere to be seen, and a moment's reflection reminded me that I had left it in its usual place. The only possible conclusion was that during our absence at the fire, somebody must have come in by the window and taken it. And it looked as if that somebody had deliberately set fire to the outbuilding for the express purpose of luring us all out of the house."

"That is what the appearances suggest," Thorndyke agreed. "Is the study window furnished with a blind or curtains?"

"Curtains," replied Mr. Blowgrave. "But they were not drawn. Anyone in the garden could have seen into the room; and the garden is easily accessible to an active person who could climb over a low wall."

"So far, then," said Thorndyke, "the robbery might be the

work of a casual prowler who had got into the garden and watched you through the window, and assuming that the things you had taken from the box were of value, seized an easy opportunity to make off with them. Were the things of any considerable value?"

"To a thief they were of no value at all. There were a number of share certificates, a lease, one or two agreements, some family photographs and a small box containing an old letter and a scarab. Nothing worth stealing, you see, for the certificates were made out in my name and were therefore unnegotiable."

"And the scarab?"

"That may have been lapis lazuli, but more probably it was a blue glass imitation. In any case it was of no considerable value. It was about an inch and a half long. But before you come to any conclusion, I had better finish the story. The robbery was on Tuesday, the seventh of June. I gave information to the police, with a description of the missing property, but nothing happened until Wednesday, the fifteenth, when I received a registered parcel bearing the Southampton postmark. On opening it I found, to my astonishment, the entire contents of the deed-box, with the exception of the scarab, and this rather mysterious communication."

He took from his pocketbook and handed to Thorndyke an ordinary envelope addressed in typewritten characters, and sealed with a large, elliptical seal, the face of which was covered with minute hieroglyphics.

"This," said Thorndyke, "I take to be an impression of the scarab; and an excellent impression it is."

"Yes," replied Mr. Blowgrave, "I have no doubt that it is the scarab. It is about the same size."

Thorndyke looked quickly at our client with an expression of surprise. "But," he asked, "don't you recognize the hieroglyphics on it?"

Mr. Blowgrave smiled deprecatingly. "The fact is," said he, "I don't know anything about hieroglyphics, but I should say, as far as I can judge, these look the same. What do you think, Nellie?"

Miss Blowgrave looked at the seal—rather vaguely—and replied, "I am in the same position. Hieroglyphics are to me just funny-looking things that don't mean anything. But these look the same to me as those on our scarab, though I expect any other hieroglyphics would, for that matter."

Thorndyke made no comment on this statement, but examined the seal attentively through his lens. Then he drew out the contents of the envelope, consisting of two letters, one typewritten and the other in a faded brown handwriting. The former he read through and then inspected the

paper closely, holding it up to the light to observe the watermark.

"The paper appears to be of Belgian manufacture," he remarked, passing it to me. I confirmed this observation and then read the letter, which was headed "Southampton" and ran thus:—

Dear old pal,

I am sending you back some trifles removed in error. The ancient document is enclosed with this, but the curio is at present in the custody of my respected uncle. Hope its temporary loss will not inconvenience you, and that I may be able to return it to you later. Meanwhile, believe me,

Your ever affectionate,

Rudolpho.

"Who is Rudolpho?" I asked.

"The Lord knows," replied Mr. Blowgrave. "A psuedonym of our absent friend, I presume. He seems to be a facetious sort of person."

"He does," agreed Thorndyke. "This letter and the seal appear to be what the schoolboys would call a leg-pull. But still, this is all quite normal. He has returned you the worthless things and has kept the one thing that has any sort of negotiable value. Are you quite clear that the scarab is not more valuable than you have assumed?"

"Well," said Mr. Blowgrave, "I have had an expert opinion on it. I showed it to M. Fouquet, the Egyptologist, when he was over here from Brussels a few months ago, and his opinion was that it was a worthless imitation. Not only was it not a genuine scarab, but the inscription was a sham, too; just a collection of hieroglyphic characters jumbled together without sense or meaning."

"Then," said Thorndyke, taking another look at the seal through his lens, "it would seem that Rudolpho, or Rudolpho's uncle, has got a bad bargain. Which doesn't throw much light on the affair."

At this point Miss Blowgrave intervened. "I think, father," said she, "you have not given Dr. Thorndyke quite all the facts about the scarab. He ought to be told about its connection with Uncle Reuben."

As the girl spoke Thorndyke looked at her with a curious expression of suddenly awakened interest. Later I understood the meaning of that look, but at the time there seemed to me nothing particularly arresting in her words.

"It is just a family tradition," Mr. Blowgrave said deprecatingly. "Probably it is all nonsense."

"Well, let us have it, at any rate," said Thorndyke. "We may get some light from it."

Thus urged, Mr. Blowgrave hemmed a little shyly and began:

"The story concerns my great-grandfather, Silas Blowgrave, and his doings during the war with France. It seems that he command-

ed a privateer, of which he and his brother Reuben were the joint owners, and that in the course of their last cruise, they acquired a very remarkable and valuable collection of jewels. Goodness knows how they got them; not very honestly, I suspect, for they appear to have been a pair of precious rascals. Something has been said about the loot from a South American church or cathedral, but there is really nothing known about the affair. There are no documents. It is mere oral tradition and very vague and sketchy. The story goes that when they had sold off the ship, they came down to live at Shawstead in Hertfordshire, Silas occupying the manor house —in which I live at present—and Reuben a farmhouse adjoining. The bulk of the loot they shared out at the end of the cruise, but the jewels were kept apart to be dealt with later—perhaps when the circumstances under which they had been acquired had been forgotten. However, both men were inveterate gamblers, and it seems—according to the testimony of a servant of Reuben's who overheard them—that on a certain night when they had been playing heavily, they decided to finish up by playing for the whole collection of jewels as a single stake. Silas, who had the jewels in his custody, was seen to go to the manor house and return to Reuben's house carrying a small, iron-bound chest.

"Apparently they played late into the night, after everyone else but the servant had gone to bed, and the luck was with Reuben, though it seems probable that he gave luck some assistance. At any rate, when the play was finished and the chest handed over, Silas roundly accused him of cheating, and we may assume that a pretty serious quarrel took place. Exactly what happened is not clear, for when the quarrel began Reuben dismissed the servant, who retired to her bedroom in a distant part of the house. But in the morning it was discovered that Reuben and the chest of jewels had both disappeared, and there were distinct traces of blood in the room in which the two men had been playing. Silas professed to know nothing about the disappearance; but a strong—and probably just—suspicion arose that he had murdered his brother and made away with the jewels. The result was that Silas also disappeared, and for a long time his whereabouts was not known even by his wife. Later it transpired that he had taken up his abode, under an assumed name, in Egypt, and that he had developed an enthusiastic interest in the then new science of Egyptology—the Rosetta Stone had been deciphered only a few years previously. After a time he resumed communication with his wife, but never made any statement as to the mystery of his brother's disappearance. A few months before

his death he visited his home in disguise and he then handed to his wife a little sealed packet which was to be delivered to his only son, William, on his attaining the age of twenty-one. That packet contained the scarab and the letter which you have taken from the envelope."

"Am I to read it?" asked Thorndyke.

"Certainly, if you think it worthwhile," was the reply.

Thorndyke opened the yellow sheet of paper and, glancing through the brown and faded writing, read aloud:

Cairo, 4th March, 1833.

My dear Son,

I am sending you, as my last gift, a valuable scarab, and a few words of counsel on which I would bid you meditate. Believe me, there is much wisdom in the lore of Old Egypt. Make it your own. Treasure the scarab as a precious inheritance. Handle it often but show it to none. Give your Uncle Reuben Christian burial. It is your duty, and you will have your reward. He robbed your father, but he shall make restitution.

Farewell!

Your affectionate father,
Silas Blowgrave.

As Thorndyke laid down the letter he looked inquiringly at our client.

"Well," he said, "here are some plain instructions. How have they been carried out?"

"They haven't been carried out at all," replied Mr. Blowgrave. "As to his son William, my grandfather, he was not disposed to meddle in the matter. This seemed to be a frank admission that Silas killed his brother and concealed the body, and William didn't choose to reopen the scandal. Besides, the instructions are not so very plain. It is all very well to say, 'Give your Uncle Reuben Christian burial,' but where the deuce is Uncle Reuben?"

"It is plainly hinted," said Thorndyke, "that whoever gives the body Christian burial will stand to benefit, and the word 'restitution' seems to suggest a clue to the whereabouts of the jewels. Has no one thought it worthwhile to find out where the body is deposited?"

"But how could they?" demanded Blowgrave. "He doesn't give the faintest clue. He talks as if his son knew where the body was. And then, you know, even supposing Silas did not take the jewels with him, there was the question, whose property were they? To begin with, they were pretty certainly stolen property, though no one knows where they came from. Then Reuben apparently got them from Silas by fraud, and Silas got them back by robbery and murder. If William had discovered them he would

have had to give them up to Reuben's sons, and yet they weren't strictly Reuben's property. No one had an undeniable claim to them, even if they could have found them."

"But that is not the case now," said Miss Blowgrave.

"No," said Mr. Blowgrave, in answer to Thorndyke's look of inquiry. "The position is quite clear now. Reuben's grandson, my cousin Arthur, has died recently, and as he had no children, he has dispersed his property. The old farmhouse and the bulk of his estate he has left to a nephew, but he made a small bequest to my daughter and named her as the residuary legatee. So that whatever rights Reuben had to the jewels are now vested in her, and on my death she will be Silas's heir, too. As a matter of fact," Mr. Blowgrave continued, "we were discussing this very question on the night of the robbery. I may as well tell you that my girl will be left pretty poorly off when I go, for there is a heavy mortgage on our property and mighty little capital. Uncle Reuben's jewels would have made the old home secure for her if we could have laid our hands on them. However, I mustn't take up your time with our domestic affairs."

"Your domestic affairs are not entirely irrelevant," said Thorndyke. "But what is it that you want me to do in the matter?"

"Well," said Blowgrave, "my house has been robbed and my premises set fire to. The police can apparently do nothing. They say there is no clue at all unless the robbery was committed by somebody in the house, which is absurd, seeing that the servants were all engaged in putting out the fire. But I want the robber traced and punished, and I want to get the scarab back. It may be intrinsically valueless, as M. Fouquet said, but Silas's testamentary letter seems to indicate that it had some value. At any rate, it is an heirloom, and I am loath to lose it. It seems a presumptuous thing to ask you to investigate a trumpery robbery, but I should take it as a great kindness if you would look into the matter."

"Cases of robbery pure and simple," replied Thorndyke, "are rather alien to my ordinary practice, but in this one there are certain curious features that seem to make an investigation worthwhile. Yes, Mr. Blowgrave, I will look into the case, and I have some hope that we may be able to lay our hands on the robber, in spite of the apparent absence of clues. I will ask you to leave both these letters for me to examine more minutely, and I shall probably want to make an inspection of the premises—perhaps tomorrow."

"Whenever you like," said Blowgrave. "I am delighted that you are willing to undertake the inquiry. I have heard so much about you from my friend Stalker,

of the Griffin Life Assurance Company, for whom you have acted on several occasions."

"Before you go," said Thorndyke, "there is one point that we must clear up. Who is there besides yourselves that knows of the existence of the scarab and this letter and the history attaching to them?"

"I really can't say," replied Blowgrave. "No one has seen them but my cousin Arthur. I once showed them to him, and he may have talked about them in the family. I didn't treat the matter as a secret."

When our visitors had gone we discussed the bearings of the case.

"It is quite a romantic story," said I, "and the robbery has its points of interest, but I am rather inclined to agree with the police—there is mighty little to go on."

"There would have been less," said Thorndyke, "if our sporting friend hadn't been so pleased with himself. That typewritten letter was a piece of gratuitous impudence. Our gentleman overrated his security and crowed too loud."

"I don't see that there is much to be gleaned from the letter, all the same," said I.

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Jervis," he exclaimed, "because I was proposing to hand the letter over to you to examine and report on."

"I was only referring to the superficial appearances," I said hastily. "No doubt a detailed examination will bring something more distinctive into view."

"I have no doubt it will," he said, "and as there are reasons for pushing on the investigation as quickly as possible, I suggest that you get to work at once. I shall occupy myself with the old letter and the envelope."

On this I began my examination without delay, and as a preliminary I proceeded to take a facsimile photograph of the letter by putting it in a large printing-frame with a sensitive plate and a plate of clear glass. The resulting negative showed not only the typewritten lettering, but also the watermark and wire lines of the paper, and a faint grease spot. Next I turned my attention to the lettering itself, and here I soon began to accumulate quite a number of identifiable peculiarities. The machine was apparently a Corona, fitted with the small "Elite" type, and the alignment was markedly defective. The "lower case"—or small—"a" was well below the line, although the capital "A" appeared to be correctly placed; the "u" was slightly above the line, and the small "m" was partly clogged with dirt.

Up to this point I had been careful to manipulate the letter with forceps (although it had been handled by at least three persons, to my knowledge), and I

now proceeded to examine it for fingerprints. As I could detect none by mere inspection, I dusted the back of the paper with finely-powdered fuchsin, and distributed the powder by tapping the paper lightly. This brought into view quite a number of fingerprints, especially round the edges of the letter, and though most of them were very faint and shadowy, it was possible to make out the ridge pattern well enough for our purpose. Having blown off the excess of powder, I took the letter to the room where the large copying camera was set up, to photograph it before developing the fingerprints on the front. But here I found our laboratory assistant, Polton, in possession, with the sealed envelope fixed to the copying easel.

"I shan't be a minute, sir," said he. "The doctor wants an enlarged photograph of this seal. I've got the plate in."

I waited while he made his exposure and then proceeded to take the photograph of the letter, or rather of the fingerprints on the back of it. When I had developed the negative I powdered the front of the letter and brought out several more fingerprints—mostly thumbs this time. They were a little difficult to see where they were imposed on the lettering, but as the latter was bright blue and the fuchsin powder was red, this confusion disappeared in the photograph, in which the lettering was almost invisible while the fingerprints were more distinct than they had appeared to the eye. This completed my examination, and when I had verified the make of typewriter by reference to our album of specimens of typewriting, I left the negatives for Polton to dry and print and went down to the sitting-room to draw up my little report. I had just finished this and was speculating on what had become of Thorndyke, when I heard his quick step on the stair and a few moments later he entered with a roll of paper in his hand. This he unrolled on the table, fixing it open with one or two lead paperweights, and I came round to inspect it, when I found it to be a sheet of the Ordnance map on the scale of twenty-five inches to the mile.

"Here is the Blowgraves' place," said Thorndyke. "Nearly in the middle of the sheet. This is his house—Shawstead Manor—and that will probably be the outbuilding that was on fire. I take it that the house marked Dingle Farm is the one that Uncle Reuben occupied."

"Probably," I agreed. "But I don't see why you wanted this map if you are going down to the place itself tomorrow."

"The advantage of a map," said Thorndyke, "is that you can see all over it at once and get the lie of the land well into your mind; and you can measure all distances accurately and quickly with

a scale and a pair of dividers. When we go down tomorrow, we shall know our way about as well as Blowgrave himself."

"And what use will that be?" I asked. "Where does the topography come into the case?"

"Well, Jervis," he replied, "there is the robber, for instance; he came from somewhere and he went somewhere. A study of the map may give us a hint as to his movements. But here comes Polton 'with the documents,' as poor Miss Flite would say. What have you got for us, Polton?"

"They aren't quite dry, sir," said Polton, laying four large bromide prints on the table. "There's the enlargement of the seal—ten by eight, mounted—and three unmounted prints of Dr. Jervis's."

Thorndyke looked at my photographs critically. "They're excellent, Jervis," said he. "The fingerprints are perfectly legible, though faint. I only hope some of them are the right ones. That is my left thumb. I don't see yours. The small one is presumably Miss Blowgrave's. We must take her fingerprints tomorrow, and her father's, too. Then we shall know if we have got any of the robber's." He ran his eye over my report and nodded approvingly. "There is plenty there to enable us to identify the typewriter if we can get hold of it, and the paper is very distinctive. What do you think of the seal?" he added, laying the enlarged photograph before me.

"It is magnificent," I replied, with a grin. "Perfectly monumental."

"What are you grinning at?"

"I was thinking that you seem to be counting your chickens in pretty good time," said I. "You are making elaborate preparations to identify the scarab, but you are disregarding the classical advice of the prudent Mrs. Glasse."

"I have a presentiment that we shall get that scarab," said he. "At any rate we ought to be in a position to identify it instantly and certainly if we are able to get a sight of it."

"We are not likely to," said I. "Still, there is no harm in providing for the improbable."

This was evidently Thorndyke's view, and he certainly made ample provision for this most improbable contingency; for, having furnished himself with a drawing-board and a sheet of tracing-paper, he pinned the latter over the photograph on the board and proceeded, with a fine pen and hectograph ink, to make a careful and minute tracing of the intricate and bewildering hieroglyphic inscription on the seal. When he had finished it he transferred it to a clay duplicator and took off half a dozen copies, one of which he handed to me. I looked at it dubiously and remarked: "You have said that the medical jurist must make all knowledge his province. Has he got to be an Egyptologist, too?"

"He will be the better medical jurist if he is," was the reply, of which I made a mental note for my future guidance. But meanwhile Thorndyke's proceedings were, to me, perfectly incomprehensible. What was his object in making this minute tracing? The seal itself was sufficient for identification. I lingered awhile hoping that some fresh development might throw a light on the mystery. But his next proceeding was like to have reduced me to stupefaction. I saw him go to the bookshelves and take down a book. As he laid it on the table I glanced at the title, and when I saw that it was Raper's "Navigation Tables" I stole softly out into the lobby, put on my hat and went for a walk.

When I returned the investigation was apparently concluded, for Thorndyke was seated in his easy chair, placidly reading "The Compleat Angler." On the table lay a large circular protractor, a straight-edge, an architect's scale and a sheet of tracing-paper on which was a tracing in hectograph ink of Shawstead Manor.

"Why did you make this tracing?" I asked. "Why not take the map itself?"

"We don't want the whole of it," he replied, "and I dislike cutting up maps."

By taking an informal lunch in the train, we arrived at Shawstead Manor by half-past two. Our approach up the drive had evidently been observed, for Blowgrave and his daughter were waiting at the porch to receive us. The former came forward with outstretched hand, but a distinctly woebegone expression, and exclaimed: "It is most kind of you to come down; but alas! you are too late."

"Too late for what?"

"I will show you," replied Blowgrave, and seizing my colleague by the arm, he strode off excitedly to a little wicket at the side of the house, and, passing through it, hurried along a narrow alley that skirted the garden wall and ended in a large meadow, at one end of which stood a dilapidated windmill. Across this meadow he bustled, dragging my

colleague with him, until he reached a heap of freshly-turned earth, where he halted and pointed tragically to a spot where the turf had evidently been raised and untidily replaced.

"There!" he exclaimed, stooping to pull up the loose turfs and thereby exposing what was evidently a large hole, recently and hastily filled in. "That was done last night or early this morning, for I walked over this meadow only yesterday evening and there was no sign of disturbed ground then."

Thorndyke stood looking down at the hole with a faint smile. "And what do you infer from that?" he asked.

"Infer!" shrieked Blowgrave. "Why, I infer that whoever dug this hole was searching for Uncle Reuben and the lost jewels!"

"I am inclined to agree with you," Thorndyke said calmly. "He happened to search in the wrong place, but that is his affair."

"The wrong place!" Blowgrave and his daughter exclaimed in unison. "How do you know it is the wrong place?"

"Because," replied Thorndyke, "I believe I know the right place, and this is not it. But we can put the matter to the test, and we had better do so. Can you get a couple of men with picks and shovels? Or shall we handle the tools ourselves?"

"I think that would be better," said Blowgrave, who was quivering with excitement. "We don't want to take anyone into our confidence if we can help it."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "Then I suggest that you fetch the tools while I locate the spot."

Blowgrave assented eagerly and went off at a brisk trot, while the young lady remained with us and watched Thorndyke with intense curiosity.

"I mustn't interrupt you with questions," said she, "but I can't imagine how you found out where Uncle Reuben was buried."

"We will go into that later," he replied; "but first we have got to find Uncle Reuben." He laid his research-case down on the ground, and opening it, took out three sheets of paper, each bearing a duplicate of his tracing of the map; and on each was marked a spot on this meadow from which a number of lines radiated like the spokes of a wheel.

"You see, Jervis," he said, exhibiting them to me, "the advantage of a map. I have been able to rule off these sets of bearings regardless of obstructions, such as those young trees, which have arisen since Silas's day, and mark the spot in its correct place. If the recent obstructions prevent us from taking the bearings, we can still find the spot by measurements with the land-chain or tape."

"Why have you got three plans?" I asked.

"Because there are three imag-

inable places. No. 1 is the most likely; No. 2 less likely, but possible; No. 3 is impossible. That is the one that our friend tried last night. No 1 is among those young trees, and we will now see if we can pick up the bearings in spite of them."

We moved on to the clump of young trees, where Thorndyke took from the research-case a tall, folding camera-tripod and a large prismatic compass with an aluminum dial. With the latter he took one or two trial bearings and then, setting up the tripod, fixed the compass on it. For some minutes Miss Blowgrave and I watched him as he shifted the tripod from spot to spot, peering through the sight-vane of the compass and glancing occasionally at the map. At length he turned to us and said:

"We are in luck. None of these trees interferes with our bearings." He took from the research-case a surveyor's arrow, and sticking it in the ground under the tripod, added: "That is the spot. But we may have to dig a good way round it, for a compass is only a rough instrument."

At this moment Mr. Blowgrave staggered up, breathing hard, and flung down on the ground three picks, two shovels and a spade. "I won't hinder you, doctor, by asking for explanations," said he, "but I am utterly mystified. You must tell us what it all means when we have finished our work."

This Thorndyke promised to do, but meanwhile he took off his coat, and rolling up his shirt sleeves, seized the spade and began cutting out a large square of turf. As the soil was uncovered, Blowgrave and I attacked it with picks and Miss Blowgrave shovelled away the loose earth.

"Do you know how far down we have to go?" I asked.

"The body lies six feet below the surface," Thorndyke replied; and as he spoke he laid down his spade, and taking a telescope from the research-case, swept it round the margin of the meadow and finally pointed it at a farmhouse some six hundred yards distant, of which he made a somewhat prolonged inspection, after which he took the remaining pick and fell to work on the opposite corner of the exposed square of earth.

For nearly half an hour we worked on steadily, gradually eating our way downwards, plying pick and shovel alternately, while Miss Blowgrave cleared the loose earth away from the edges of the deepening pit. Then a halt was called and we came to the surface, wiping our faces.

"I think, Nellie," said Blowgrave, divesting himself of his waistcoat, "a jug of lemonade and four tumblers would be useful, unless our visitors would prefer beer."

We both gave our votes for lemonade, and Miss Nellie tripped away towards the house, while

Thorndyke, taking up his telescope, once more inspected the farmhouse.

"You seem greatly interested in that house," I remarked.

"I am," he replied, handing me the telescope. "Just take a look at the window in the right hand gable, but keep under the tree."

I pointed the telescope at the gable and there observed an open window at which a man was seated. He held a binocular glass to his eyes and the instrument appeared to be directed at us.

"We are being spied on, I fancy," said I, passing the telescope to Blowgrave, "but I suppose it doesn't matter. This is your land, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Blowgrave, "but still, we didn't want any spectators. That is Harold Bowker," he added, steadying the telescope against a tree, "my cousin Arthur's nephew, whom I told you about as having inherited the farmhouse. He seems mighty interested in us; but small things interest one in the country."

Here the appearance of Miss Nellie, advancing across the meadow with an inviting looking basket, diverted our attention from our inquisitive watcher. Six thirsty eyes were riveted on that basket until it drew near and presently disgorged a great glass jug and four tumblers, when we each took off a long and delicious draught and then jumped down into the pit to resume our labors.

Another half-hour passed. We had excavated in some places to nearly the full depth and were just discussing the advisability of another short rest when Blowgrave, who was working in one corner, uttered a loud cry and stood up suddenly, holding something in his fingers. A glance at the object showed it to be a bone, brown and earth-stained, but evidently a bone. Evidently, too, a human bone, as Thorndyke decided when Blowgrave handed it to him triumphantly.

"We have been very fortunate," said he, "to get so near at the first trial. This is from the right great toe, so we may assume that the skeleton lies just outside this pit, but we had better excavate carefully in your corner and see exactly how the bones lie." This he proceeded to do himself, probing cautiously with the spade and clearing the earth away from the corner. Very soon the remaining bones of the right foot came into view and then the ends of the two legbones and a portion of the left foot.

"We can see now," said he, "how the skeleton lies, and all we have to do is to extend the excavation in that direction. But there is only room for one to work down here. I think you and Mr. Blowgrave had better dig down from the surface.

On this I climbed out of the pit, followed reluctantly by Blowgrave, who still held the little

brown bone in his hand and was in a state of wild excitement and exultation that somewhat scandalized his daughter.

"It seems rather ghoulish," she remarked, "to be gloating over poor Uncle Reuben's body in this way."

"I know," said Blowgrave, "it isn't reverent. But I didn't kill Uncle Reuben, you know, whereas—well it was a long time ago." With this rather inconsequent conclusion he took a draught of lemonade, seized his pick and fell to work with a will. I, too, indulged in a draught and passed a full tumbler down to Thorndyke. But before resuming my labors I picked up the telescope and once more inspected the farmhouse. The window was still open, but the watcher had apparently become bored with the not very thrilling spectacle. At any rate he had disappeared.

From this time onward every few minutes brought some discovery. First, a pair of deeply rusted steel shoe buckles; then one or two buttons, and presently a fine gold watch with a fob-chain and a bunch of seals, looking uncannily new and fresh and seeming more fraught with tragedy than even the bones themselves. In his cautious digging, Thorndyke was careful not to disturb the skeleton; and looking down into the narrow trench that was growing from the corner of the pit, I could see both legs, with only the right foot missing, projecting from the miniature cliff. Meanwhile our part of the trench was deepening rapidly, so that Thorndyke presently warned us to stop digging and bade us come down and shovel away the earth as he disengaged it.

At length the whole skeleton, excepting the head, was uncovered, though it lay undisturbed as it might have lain in its coffin. And now, as Thorndyke picked away the earth around the head, we could see that the skull was propped forward as if it rested on a high pillow. A little more careful probing with the pickpoint served to explain this appearance. For as the earth fell away and disclosed the grinning skull, there came into view the edge and iron-bound corners of a small chest.

It was an impressive spectacle; weird, solemn and rather dreadful. There for over a century the ill-fated gambler had lain, his mouldering head pillowed on the booty of unrecorded villainy, booty that had been won by fraud, retrieved by violence, and hidden at last by the final winner with the witness of his crime.

"Here is a fine text for a moralist who would preach on the vanity of riches," said Thorndyke.

We all stood silent for awhile, gazing, not without awe, at the stark figure that lay guarding the ill-gotten treasure. Miss Blowgrave—who had been helped down when we descended—

crept closer to her father and murmured that it was "rather awful"; while Blowgrave himself displayed a queer mixture of exultation and shuddering distaste.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a voice from above, and we all looked up with a start. A youngish man was standing on the brink of the pit, looking down on us with very evident disapproval.

"It seems that I have come just in the nick of time," observed the newcomer. "I shall have to take possession of that chest, you know, and of the remains, too, I suppose. That is my ancestor, Reuben Blowgrave."

"Well, Harold," said Blowgrave, "you can have Uncle Reuben if you want him. But the chest belongs to Nellie."

Here Mr. Harold Bowker—I recognized him now as the watcher from the window—dropped down into the pit and advanced with something of a swagger.

"I am Reuben's heir," said he, "through my Uncle Arthur, and I take possession of this property and the remains."

"Pardon me, Harold," said Blowgrave, "but Nellie is Arthur's residuary legatee, and this is the residue of the estate."

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Bowker. "By the way, how did you find out where he was buried?"

"Oh, that was quite simple," replied Thorndyke with unexpected geniality. "I'll show you the plan." He climbed up to the surface and returned in a few moments with the three tracings and his letter-case. "This is how we located the spot." He handed the plan marked No. 3 to Bowker, who took it from him and stood looking at it with a puzzled frown.

"But this isn't the place," he said at length.

"Isn't it?" queried Thorndyke. "No, of course; I've given you the wrong one. This is the plan." He handed Bowker the plan marked No. 1, and took the other from him, laying it down on a heap of earth. Then, as Bowker pored gloomily over No. 1, he took a knife and a pencil from his pocket, and with his back to our visitor, scraped the lead of the pencil, letting the black powder fall on the plan that he had just laid down. I watched him with some curiosity; and when I observed that the black scrapings fell on two spots near the edges of the paper, a sudden suspicion flashed into my mind, which was confirmed when I saw him tap the paper lightly with his pencil, gently blow away the powder, and quickly producing my photograph of the typewritten letter from his case, hold it for a moment beside the plan.

"This is all very well," said Bowker, looking up from the plan, "but how did you find out about these bearings?"

Thorndyke swiftly replaced the

letter in his case, and turning round, replied, "I am afraid I can't give you any further information."

"Can't you, indeed!" Bowker exclaimed insolently. "Perhaps I shall compel you to. But, at any rate, I forbid any of you to lay hands on my property."

Thorndyke looked at him steadily and said in an ominously quiet tone:

"Now, listen to me, Mr. Bowker. Let us have an end of this nonsense. You have played a risky game and you have lost. How much you have lost I can't say until I know whether Mr. Blowgrave intends to prosecute."

"To prosecute!" shouted Bowker. "What the deuce do you mean by prosecute?"

"I mean," said Thorndyke, "that on the 7th of June, after nine o'clock at night, you entered the dwelling-house of Mr. Blowgrave and stole and carried away certain of his goods and chattels. A part of them you have restored, but you are still in possession of some of the stolen property, to wit, a scarab and a deed-box."

As Thorndyke made this statement in his calm, level tones, Bowker's face blanched to a tallowy white, and he stood staring at my colleague, the very picture of astonishment and dismay. But he fired a last shot.

"This is sheer midsummer madness," he exclaimed huskily; "and you know it."

Thorndyke turned to our host. "It is for you to settle, Mr. Blowgrave," said he. "I hold conclusive evidence that Mr. Bowker stole your deed-box. If you decide to prosecute I shall produce that evidence in court and he will certainly be convicted."

Blowgrave and his daughter looked at the accused man with an embarrassment almost equal to his own.

"I am astounded," the former said at length; "but I don't want to be vindictive. Look here, Harold, hand over the scarab and we'll say no more about it."

"You can't do that," said Thorndyke. "The law doesn't allow you to compound a robbery. He can return the property if he pleases and you can do as you think best about prosecuting. But you can't make conditions."

There was silence for some seconds; then, without another word, the crestfallen adventurer turned, and scrambling up out of the pit, took a hasty departure.

It was nearly a couple of hours later that, after a leisurely wash and a hasty, nondescript meal, we carried the little chest from the dining room to the study. Here, when he had closed the French window and drawn the curtains, Mr. Blowgrave produced a set of tools and we fell to work on the iron fastenings of the chest. It was no light task, though a century's rust had thinned the stout bands,

but at length the lid yielded to the thrust of a long case-opener and rose with a protesting creak. The chest was lined with a double thickness of canvas, apparently part of a sail, and contained a number of small leather bags, which, as we lifted them out, one by one, felt as if they were filled with pebbles. But when we untied the thongs of one and emptied its contents into a wooden bowl, Blowgrave heaved a sigh of ecstasy and Miss Nellie uttered a little scream of delight. They were all cut stones, and most of them of exceptional size; rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and a few diamonds. As to their value, we could form but the vaguest guess; but Thorndyke, who was a fair judge of gem-stones, gave it as his opinion that they were fine specimens of their kind, though roughly cut, and that they had probably formed the enrichment of some shrine.

"The question is," said Blowgrave, gazing gloatingly on the bowl of sparkling gems, "what are we to do with them?"

"I suggest," said Thorndyke, "that Dr. Jervis stays here tonight to help you to guard them and that in the morning you take them up to London and deposit them at your bank."

Blowgrave fell in eagerly with this suggestion, which I seconded. "But," said he, "that chest is a queer-looking package to be carrying abroad. Now, if we only had that confounded deed-box—"

"There's a deed-box on the cabinet behind you," said Thorndyke.

Blowgrave turned round sharply. "God bless us!" he exclaimed. "It has come back the way it went. Harold must have slipped in at the window while we were at tea. Well, I'm glad he has made restitution. When I look at that bowl and think what he must have narrowly missed, I don't feel inclined to be hard on him. I suppose the scarab is inside—not that it matters much now."

The scarab was inside in an envelope; and as Thorndyke turned it over in his hand and examined the hieroglyphics on it through his lens Miss Blowgrave asked: "Is it of any value, Dr. Thorndyke? It can't have any connection with the secret of the hiding-place, because you found the jewels without it.

"By the way, Doctor, I don't know whether it is permissible for me to ask, but how on earth *did* you find out where the jewels were hidden? To me it looks like black magic."

Thorndyke laughed in a quiet, inward fashion. "There is nothing magical about it," said he. "It was a perfectly simple, straightforward problem. But Miss Nellie is wrong. We had the scarab; that is to say we had the wax impression of it, which is the same thing. And the scarab was the key to the riddle. You see," he continued, "Silas's letter and the

scarab formed together a sort of intelligence test."

"Did they?" said Blowgrave. "Then he drew a blank every time."

Thorndyke chuckled. "His descendants were certainly a little lacking in enterprise," he admitted. "Silas's instructions were perfectly plain and explicit. Whoever would find the treasure must first acquire some knowledge of Egyptian lore and must study the scarab attentively. It was the broadest of hints, but no one—excepting Harold Bowker, who must have heard about the scarab from his Uncle Arthur—seems to have paid any attention to it.

"Now it happens that I have just enough elementary knowledge of the hieroglyphic characters to enable me to spell them out when they are used alphabetically; and as soon as I saw the seal, I could see that these hieroglyphics formed English words. My attention was first attracted by the second group of signs, which spelled the word 'Reuben,' and then I saw that the first group spelled 'Uncle.' Of course, the instant I heard Miss Nellie speak of the connection between the scarab and Uncle Reuben, the murder was out. I saw at a glance that the scarab contained all the required information. Last night I made a careful tracing of the hieroglyphics and then rendered them into our own alphabet. This is the result."

He took from his letter-case and spread out on the table a duplicate of the tracing which I had seen him make, and of which he had given me a copy. But since I had last seen it, it had received an addition; under each group of signs the equivalents in modern Roman lettering had been written, and these made the following words:

"UNKL RUBN IS IN TH MILL FIELD SKS FT DOWN CHURCH SPIR NORTH TEN THIRTY EAST DINGL SOUTH GABL NORTH ATY FORTY FIF WST GOD SAF KING JORJ."

Our two friends gazed at Thorndyke's transliteration in blank astonishment. At length Blowgrave remarked: "But this translation must have demanded a very profound knowledge of the Egyptian writing."

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke. "Any intelligent person could master the Egyptian alphabet in an hour. The language, of course, is quite another matter. The spelling of this is a little crude, but it is quite intelligible and does Silas great credit, considering how little was known in his time."

"How do you suppose M. Fouquet came to overlook this?" Blowgrave asked.

"Naturally enough," was the

reply. "He was looking for an Egyptian inscription. But this is not an Egyptian inscription. Does he speak English?"

"Very little. Practically not at all."

"Then, as the words are English words and imperfectly spelt, the hieroglyphics must have appeared to him mere nonsense. And he was right as to the scarab being an imitation."

"There is another point," said Blowgrave. "How was it that Harold made that extraordinary mistake about the place? The directions are clear enough. All you had to do was to go out there with a compass and take the bearings just as they were given."

"But," said Thorndyke, "that is exactly what he did, and hence the mistake. He was apparently unaware of the phenomenon known as the Secular Variation of the Compass. As you know, the compass does not—usually—point to true north, but to the Magnetic North; and the Magnetic North is continually changing its position. When Reuben was buried—about 1810—it was twenty-four degrees, twenty-six minutes west of true north; at the present time it is fourteen degrees, forty-eight minutes west of true north. So Harold's bearings would be no less than ten degrees out, which, of course, gave him a totally wrong position. But Silas was a shipmaster, a navigator, and of course, knew all about the vagaries of the compass; and, as his directions were intended for use at some date unknown to him, I assumed that the bearings that he gave were true bearings—that when he said 'north' he meant true north, which is always the same; and this turned out to be the case. But I also prepared a plan with magnetic bearings corrected up to date. Here are the three plans: No 1—the one we used—showing true bearings; No. 2, showing corrected magnetic bearings which might have given us the correct spot; and No. 3, with uncorrected magnetic bearings, giving us the spot where Harold dug, and which could not possibly have been the right spot."

On the following morning I escorted the deed-box filled with the booty and tied up and sealed with the scarab, to Mr. Blowgrave's bank. And that ended our connection with the case; excepting that, a month or two later, we attended by request the unveiling in Shawstead churchyard of a fine monument to Reuben Blowgrave. This took the slightly inappropriate form of an obelisk, on which were cut the name and approximate dates, with the added inscription: "Cast thy bread upon the waters and it shall return after many days"; concerning which Thorndyke remarked dryly that he supposed the exhortation applied equally even if the bread happened to belong to someone else.

witness to murder

by . . . Wenzell Brown

He was nearer. Only terror could make her stare like that. Her lips had gone slack; her face turned pale.

CRADDOCK was frightened. He stared about him at the terraced lawn long gone to seed. Grass grew knee high. A few shaggy yellow flowers clustered along the sides of the buildings. The sun, almost ready to set, sent elongated shadows across the grass and shimmered with unnatural brilliance on the dusty windows of the old house.

Craddock shivered, partly from the crisp autumn air but mostly through fear of this unknown place. He wanted to run. But in what direction? Behind him was the wall with the locked gate. In front was the deserted Lassiter house, its windows watching him like unblinking eyes. The house was rumored to be haunted. Craddock didn't believe in ghosts, but all the same there was something forbidding, sinister, about the Lassiter place. He didn't want to put his beliefs to the test.

He hunched forward a little and uttered a soft whimper. Pain rasped through his shoulder where he had struck it when he fell. What crazy impulse had made him come here? If the bunch of

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boys on the corner had only left him alone, he'd be at home now, safe in his room.

The boys were to blame, he thought with a spasm of hot, futile anger. They were always taunting him because he was so tall and thin and because of his hare-lip that turned his speech into ludicrous bumbling sounds. They thought he was a freak or a half-wit just because of how he looked and because there was no way for him to express himself.

The gang who hung around Talbot's store weren't much younger than he—fourteen or fifteen to his seventeen. Yet the tallest of them wouldn't come up to his arm-pit. He couldn't make friends with them. He couldn't fight them either. He'd learned that the hard way. A couple of times when they had jumped him, he'd struck back. But he was clumsy and awkward and besides he didn't really want to hurt anybody. They had borne him to the ground, ripped off part of his clothing, laughing all the time. Usually they were content just to gibe at him, to mimic his gurgling speech or to pretend to chase him as he ran away, his long arms flapping at his sides.

This afternoon there had been three of them in front of Talbot's. He had known he was in for trouble right from the beginning. The kid called Tommy had shouted, "Hey, look, here comes Craddock, the Haddock," and the others had picked up the refrain.

He'd tried to pass by them, pretending not to hear, but they had blocked his path. He'd tried to speak to them then, to placate them. That was the worst thing he could have done. The words came out slurred, meaningless, and the boys had imitated him, making grotesque animal sounds.

He'd felt the tears sting his eyes and he'd had to run, even though he knew that they'd give chase. His flight turned into headlong panic as he heard the clatter of the boys' feet and their jeers behind him. He had outdistanced them easily because, for all his clumsiness, he was fast and he was accustomed to flight. Then up ahead of him, he had heard more shouts. Two other boys were racing toward him and he was trapped midway in the block. Across the street was a solid row of houses, each with its little garden, its narrow driveway. The hill was steep and each house would have a high back fence to be scaled. If he darted into one of the driveways, some indignant householder might seize him by the collar, demand an explanation for his trespass. In that case the boys would watch, holding their sides with laughter, while all he could do would be to gibber and try to pull away.

On his left, the massive stone walls of the Lassiter estate rose like a fortress. The gate loomed

up ahead of him. If he could climb it and drop to the other side, he'd have a respite. The boys wouldn't dare follow him inside. How high was the wall? Twenty-five feet. Maybe thirty. He'd never make it. But it was better to try than to let himself be mauled by the boys.

The sunken doorway made the first part of his climb easy. Then jagged rock gave him a foothold and he swung himself higher, out of reach of the boys below. He could hear them shouting up at him and he sensed that their jeering was tempered with fear. "Hey, Skinny, have you blown your top? Come back down. We won't hurt ya."

He didn't dare turn or look over his shoulder. Beneath him was the solid brick of the sidewalk. His fingers clutched at crumbling stone and he pulled himself up a few more inches. His body flattened against the wall. The voices seemed to fade away. There was no room in his mind for them. His knees pressed hard against the sharp edge of a rock. Cloth ripped and it felt as though a knife had slashed across his thigh.

He inched up higher and now his palms were slippery with sweat and his fingertips bloody where he had scraped them on the corroded concrete surface.

Dizziness took hold of him, almost sent him crashing backward to the sidewalk. He clung on blindly. He couldn't get back down now. Somehow he had to keep on climbing. Pain left him and the sense of time too. He was unaware of anything except the sick giddiness that enfolded him and the urgent need to climb higher and higher.

His hand gripped the top of the wall and his fingers circled something hard. Relief surged through him. He pulled himself up, indifferent to his torn clothing, the abrasions on his legs, his thighs, his chest. He was safe for a while, lying flat on the narrow ledge. He glanced down at the boys who stood in a semi-circle peering up at him. Their bodies were curiously fore-shortened and they seemed far, far away. They were calling to him but their words made no sense. He turned his face away from them and was sick.

He still had to get down, but that shouldn't be so difficult. The terraced lawn was beneath him and huge maples spread thick branches close to the wall. He pulled himself along to the nearest tree. A limb jutted out, nearly parallel to the wall. He reached for it. The bark was firm and smooth. He grasped the limb with both hands and swung outward, his body dangling in mid air. He had been confident that the branch would hold his weight and that he could move hand over hand to the trunk. But he had forgotten the blood that coated his palms. He felt his fingers slipping

slowly and there was nothing he could do. He hurtled downward. The branches lashed at him but they helped to break his fall. He landed on matted grass. He was winded and his shoulder felt as though it were licked by flames, but otherwise he was uninjured.

He lay still. After awhile his breathing became more regular and the fire in his shoulder died down. But now he was aware of his many cuts and bruises, the throbbing in his hands and knees. He twisted to one side and buried his head in his arm, trying to choke back the sobs that racked his thin body.

Maybe he'd blacked out or maybe he'd slept. He didn't know which. He came to with a start, not remembering where he was at first or what had happened to him. He arose shakily. His clothes were in a mess and there was blood all over him. He'd have to find a way out of the grounds. But now the wide overgrown lawn and the looming gray house seemed to hold a threat. He moved forward slowly, his feet tangling in the thick grass. He ought to hurry but he could not force himself out into the bright sunlight. Instead he hugged the shadows, despite the cold wind that chilled him.

He stumbled across a pathway of sunken stones and fell to one knee. He could see the strip of cement that led from the garage up the sharp incline, past the side of the house. A tall wrought-iron gate separated the drive from the sidewalk. The gate was spiked but it wouldn't be too hard to climb. Anyway, the retaining wall was low at the front of the house. All he had to do was run along the drive and take a leap and he'd be out of the place. So why was he waiting? Why didn't he get out into the open?

Supposing someone was lurking outside the gates. Maybe the boys had told the cop on the beat about his climbing the wall and dropping into the Lassiter grounds. He remembered the time he'd ducked in back of old Mrs. Forrester's house. He'd thought it was a safe place to hide. But Mrs. Forrester had called the police and told them that there was a prowler on her back lawn. Officer Kelly had come in after him and pulled him out from behind some bushes. Kelly had twisted his arm in back of him until he'd screamed shrilly. Kelly's broad red face had been filled with disgust and he'd said, "Okay, Craddock, this time I'm letting you go. But if I catch you snooping around any more backyards I'm pulling you in, see? I ain't having any freaks around my beat. This time I'm giving you a break. But next time I'm handing you the book."

Craddock had tried to explain but the words got all jumbled up and his tongue had seemed as though it were inches thick. Kelly

had spat onto the sidewalk. "Maybe I ought to take you in after all. Scram out of here before I change my mind."

Craddock had run then, the way he always ran, with his long arms flapping, not daring to look behind.

Kelly could be out in front now, watching for him. Just a little longer and it would be dark. He'd stand a better chance of getting away unseen. No one would notice his torn clothing in the darkness either and start asking questions. And when he got home, the flat would be empty because his mother would be at work, cleaning up in the big office building downtown after business had closed for the day. He couldn't take any more nagging from her, not tonight. By morning, maybe he'd be able to mend the rips in his jacket and trousers. Or if he couldn't, he'd get rid of them.

A clanging sound made him raise his head. Someone was at the gate, fooling around with the padlock, the heavy chain. Could it be Kelly searching for him? Craddock flattened himself on the grass and peered toward the gate. The wrought-iron decorations almost hid the figure, but he could tell it was that of a man. Not Kelly, because he could catch a glimpse of a black coat, a Homburg hat.

The gate swung open and the figure receded. A minute later a big black car nosed into the driveway. Craddock scarcely dared to breathe. If the car headed for the garage, it would pass within a few feet of him and he'd be spotted for sure. The car braked at the side entrance and just as it did, Craddock felt the first spatter of rain. He glanced up. Gray clouds scudded across the sky, bringing swift darkness with them. When he looked back toward the car, the man was already at the side door of the house, fitting a key in the lock. The man's back was turned but he gave the impression of strength. He was only of medium height but his shoulders were broad and there was something cat-like in his crouched stance.

The man pushed the door inward then half-turned and called to someone in the car. A woman stepped out and hurried through the spattering rain to the steps. Her face was averted and she was wrapped in a cloak but Craddock judged from her litheness, from the confident way in which she held herself that she was young and pretty. She gave a tinkling laugh as she brushed by the man who held the door for her. The sound was cut off as she went inside and he followed, closing the door behind them.

Now was the time to get out. The gate was unlocked. All he'd have to do would be to run up the drive, squeeze past the car, fling the gate open and he'd be in the clear. Even if the man or woman spotted him, what could they do?

He'd be out and away before they could stop him.

He half rose and a cry was wrenched from his lips. His knee had stiffened and agonizing pain shot along his shoulder. If he tried to make a dash for it, he'd go flat on his face. Maybe if he waited, the pair inside the house would leave. Then he could take his time getting out. Besides, there was something else he wanted—to see the girl's face. He wasn't snooping, he told himself; he just wanted to prove that he was right, that she was young and pretty, like the girls you saw in the movies.

He licked his lips. The raindrops were cold and slightly sweet on his tongue. Pretty soon he'd be soaked unless he found some shelter. A garage was nearby. It had a second story, probably designed as quarters for the chauffeur. High, narrow steps led up to a recessed porch. Craddock crept to the stairs. The wood was rotting, but he thought it would hold his weight. He started to climb, holding on to a rusted metal balustrade. The wood shifted beneath him, creaked a little, but the sound was covered by the splattering of rain. A roof shaded the porch. Craddock moved backward into the deep shadows and stood still, waiting.

A light glimmered somewhere in the ground floor of the house. Craddock strained his eyes but all he could see was a pale yellow blur as though the light were shining dimly through a transom. A door swung open and he could see into a hallway. He caught a glimpse of the man's silhouette, then there was shadowed movement farther along the hall. It was the girl. But before Craddock could really see her, the door closed and left only darkness.

What were these two people doing in the Lassiter house which was supposed to be deserted and haunted? Craddock tried to pull out of his memory the stories he had heard about the Lassiters. Old Mr. and Mrs. Lassiter used to live alone in the big, rambling house with only a serving couple, nearly as old and feeble as themselves. There had been a son, Steve, but he'd got into trouble of some kind and the old people had disowned him. Craddock had never understood exactly what Steve had done. There had been talk about women and something called sadism. Craddock had been curious but he sensed that he'd better not ask questions, even if he could make anyone understand.

Craddock had never seen old Mr. Lassiter but he'd seen his wife a few times. She had been gray-haired, slender, with a thin pale face and colorless lips. She had dressed in black. It must be seven years ago, maybe eight, since Mr. Lassiter had died. Steve had come home then to the funeral and he and his mother had made up. The two of them had lived in

the house together for nearly a year and everyone said young Steve had changed, that he'd settled down, put aside his wild ways.

Then one morning the old serving woman had found Mrs. Lassiter dead. She had been held by the throat and her head struck again and again against the heavy mahogany foot-board of the bed. Suspicion had rested on Steve for awhile but he'd had an alibi, one that stood up. He'd claimed that he spent the night in the nearby town of Hardwick with a girl. And she backed his story. A window in the back of the house had been found broken and there were signs that several of the rooms had been ransacked. In the end the police had put the slaying down to prowlers. But there were still some people in the town who claimed that Steve Lassiter had got away with murder.

The old house had been closed down after that and Steve had left the city. Rumors had it that the ghost of Mrs. Lassiter roamed the house at night and sometimes came out into the grounds moaning. But that was all nonsense, Craddock told himself. All the same he sucked in his breath as the wind whistled in the corners of the balcony.

Craddock searched his memory for a picture of Steve Lassiter. Maybe he'd seen him sometime but if he had, he couldn't remember. A light snapped on on the second floor, bathing the porch in a yellow glow. The sudden glare of it took Craddock by surprise. He ducked down behind the railing and peered through the bannister.

He could see into the brightly lighted room. The girl was standing near the foot of the big four-poster bed. She was as pretty as he'd imagined but not so young. Perhaps she was twenty-seven or eight. She was wearing a dark-green dress with a low neckline, that made her throat and arms look firm and white. Her face was oval with a rounded chin and a small, pouting mouth. Her high, narrow cheekbones gave an Oriental cast to her eyes. Her hair was swept up over her high forehead and Craddock caught the glint of red in it. And now he remembered something else. The girl who had given Steve Lassiter his alibi had been a readhead.

The girl seemed to be looking directly at him. Her lips were moving and Craddock had the impression that she was speaking to him, but of course he couldn't hear any words. Her hands spread out in a gesture of pleading, as though she were asking for some favor that she knew would be denied. The man came into Craddock's range of vision then. Not all of him, just his shoulder and his arm. The man was between the girl and the window, close to the wall. He reached back suddenly and pulled down the shade.

The porch was dark again but not completely so. A rip in the shade let out a rough triangle of light. A section of the dark-green cloth hung down below the sill. By shifting his position, Craddock could still see a part of the room.

The man's back was toward him, almost concealing the girl. He took a step forward and the girl was visible once more. Something about her had changed. Her lips had gone slack and her face turned pale. Her hands clutched the footboard of the bed and her eyes stared straight ahead. Craddock had been frightened often enough to recognize fear when he saw it. Only terror could make a woman stare like that.

Again the man came between them. He was crouched forward a little, moving slowly, surely, like a huge cat about to pounce on its prey. The girl shrank away from him, edging along the bed. Craddock could see her bare arm, her throat, then her face. It had changed into a mask of horror. Her mouth opened to scream. A thin sound, high-pitched and shrill reached him for a moment, then it was cut off.

The man had leaped forward and his hands were about the girl's throat, pressing hard. She crumpled under his weight and started to fall but he pulled her to him. Then with a heave of his shoulders, he sent her spinning backward, to crash against the heavy footboard. Craddock saw her head strike the dark, carved wood, saw the spurt of blood. Then blind panic seized him. He rushed for the narrow stairway and without thought of caution started to race down it. The rotting wood splintered beneath his weight. A step gave way and sent him sprawling into the driveway below.

He was hurt but there was no time to see how badly. He forced himself up and was running again. His shoes made a clattering sound on the cement but he no longer cared. Only one thing was important—to get away. The car almost blocked the driveway but he managed to squeeze by it. Then he was in the clear. Behind him he heard a door flung open, the bellow of a man's voice. He half-turned. The man was coming through the doorway, moving fast. Craddock's hand snatched at the gate, pulled it open. He was on the street now, running. Were there footsteps following him? He couldn't tell. The sound of his own feet, the thud of his heart, drowned out every other sound.

Only when he reached the corner two blocks away did he dare to slow down. The night was silent. He peered back through the tunnel made by the trees. The asphalt glistened black where the street lights shone upon it. The rain played a muted tattoo on the thick leaves. Other than that there was no sound, no movement.

He ought to find someone, tell them what he had seen. Maybe the girl was still alive, maybe he could save her. But who would listen to him? Who would take the time to decipher his burbling speech? He ran on. The streets were all but deserted. The few passersby hurried against the wind and rain. In front of Talbot's he saw Officer Kelly. He'd have to try to make him understand. He rushed toward Kelly, calling out to him. But excitement made his voice more unintelligible than ever. The words came out in sharp, squealing sounds that he could not control.

Kelly looked him over contemptuously. "What's the matter with you Craddock? You been prowling backyards again? Honest to God, I ought to run you in as a peeper."

Craddock clutched at his arm. Kelly drew away in disgust and his eyes took in the soiled, ripped clothing. "You been in a fight or something. Is that it? Well, I can't do nothing about it. Geeziz, if you weren't such a creep, the boys would leave you alone. Now beat it before I get sore."

Craddock fell back. Even if he could make Kelly understand, what then? He'd have to admit he'd been snooping around the Lassiter grounds where he had no business. Besides, who would take his word against that of the man who must be Steve Lassiter. Craddock choked off his words, turned and shuffled away, feeling Kelly's eyes on his back.

He let himself into the tiny flat which he shared with his mother. The place was dark. His mother wouldn't be home until after midnight. He went to the icebox and poured himself some milk but he couldn't drink it. He ought to try to clean his clothes but he was too tired and his whole body seemed to ache. He stumbled to his own room, stripped his clothes off and threw himself down on the bed. He pulled a blanket over him and buried his head in the pillow. He went to sleep without even turning off the light.

When he awakened the next day it was past noon. His mother was standing over him. She had found the pile of ripped, bloody clothing on the floor, the light burning. Her voice rose as she railed at him. Did she work all night so he could tear up his clothes, waste electricity? He wanted to tell her about last night. Sometimes she'd listen patiently, helping him as he stumbled over the words. But today he couldn't pierce through her anger. Besides, he wasn't sure of himself any longer. What if he'd imagined the terror in the girl's face last night? What if her scream had really been the wind? Maybe Steve Lassiter had brought the girl there to make love to her. Maybe they had wrestled around the room. Maybe she had fallen against the bed. No, he didn't believe that but it was

what everyone else would think. And how could he prove differently?

When his mother finally left him, he got up and dressed slowly.

His shoulder was throbbing and the gashes on his thigh and knees made him limp. He wanted to go back to the Lassiter house, see if the gate was still open, the car still there. But he didn't dare. He'd be too easy to spot if he started hanging around the place. The man must have got a good look at him last night. If he had really killed the girl he'd know that Craddock was a threat to his safety; he'd be on the lookout for him.

Craddock heard the door of the flat slam and the heavy tread of his mother's feet as she clumped down the stairs. He went out into the kitchen and filled a bowl with cornflakes, poured milk over it and sprinkled it with sugar. The cereal tasted like sawdust but he gulped down half of it. The rest he flushed down the toilet so that his mother wouldn't know that he'd wasted it. Maybe he should just forget the whole thing. It was like the kids said at school, if you kept your lip zipped and your nose clean you saved yourself a lot of trouble. But he couldn't get the picture of the girl out of his mind. What if she was lying there wounded? What if the man had been frightened away when he heard Craddock outside? What if he'd bolted and left the girl where she was? Somehow Craddock had to see into the room again. But he didn't dare go back to the Lassiter place in the daytime. Maybe tonight he could bring himself to do it.

He thought of Jimmy Hay who worked behind the counter at Talbot's. When the store was empty, Jimmy sometimes talked to Craddock, even took time to make sense out of his burbling speech. Jimmy came closest to being a friend of anyone Craddock knew. If Craddock could only tell his story, Jimmy would know what to do. But he'd never manage to tell it all without being interrupted. And even Jimmy wouldn't believe him if he blurted out a lot of stuff about murder and a beautiful girl.

The thing to do was write it all out and then try to persuade Jimmy to read it. He went to a desk and took out some paper and a ball-point pen. He folded the paper into his pocket. He'd better find a quiet spot to do his writing. If he stayed here, his mother might interrupt him at any moment. And now it seemed important that he should have the whole story prepared before anyone saw it.

He jerked open the door and started down the stairs. Halfway down he came to an abrupt stop. A new fear gripped him. The man must have got a good look at him last night. And Craddock

with his bean-pole body, his flapping arms, wouldn't be hard to trace. What if the man had found out where he lived, was waiting outside for him to appear? The man had to be Steve Lassiter. Craddock had seen him kill once. How many more murders had Lassiter committed? Craddock had no way of knowing. But if Lassiter realized what he had seen, Craddock was sure he would not hesitate to kill again.

Craddock crept down the stairs with exaggerated caution. The hallway was dark and a man could be crouched in the shadows beneath the stairs ready to strike. Craddock leaned across the bannister and gave an involuntary cry as shadows merged together to form a black pattern on the wall. Then he realized that it was his own body, blocking the light from above, that had given shape to the shadows. He fought to repress the high-pitched giggle that rose in his throat.

He speeded up his descent but at the door he stopped again. Old jalopies and a truck or two lined the ugly street but near the corner was a big black car—a Packard. Was this the car that had been in the Lassiter driveway last night? He couldn't be sure but it looked like it. A man sat at the wheel, his back turned, his body partly concealed by the metal frame of the car. The dark overcoat, the Homburg, the big hand resting on the wheel, even the set of the shoulders all made him think of Lassiter.

While Craddock watched the man stirred, opened the side door. Craddock didn't wait to get a look at him. He was running. A few feet along the narrow sidewalk was an alley. He ran the length of it and then squeezed between two houses to a side street.

Instinctively he headed for the park. There were trees there, thick shrubs, a low bridge under which he'd hidden many a time from Tommy and the gang. He was running too fast and when he reached the embankment, he stumbled and fell sprawling, rolling over and over until he was at the very edge of the icy stream that trickled beneath the bridge. He sat up slowly. His fall had opened the wound in his thigh. Blood was soaking his trousers leg. He squatted on the hard earth, bending forward, his head between his bony knees.

He had thought of this place as a refuge but suddenly he realized that it might well be a trap. On a cold windy day like this the park would be practically deserted. If Lassiter had followed him and should find him here, he would be at the older man's mercy. Craddock's hand stretched out to feel the concrete buttress of the bridge. Lassiter could crush his head against the rough surface and no matter how Craddock cried out, there would be no one to hear.

He scrambled to his feet and stood there swaying, uncertain in what direction to move. He forced himself to calm down a little, then started to crawl up the embankment. There were bushes at the top. He pushed them aside and peered out. No one was in sight. The asphalt roadway was a quarter of a mile away but he could see a stretch of it through a clearing in the trees. A big black car idled along, not going more than ten miles an hour. Craddock ducked back into the bushes and waited. A few minutes later the car appeared again from the opposite direction, still cruising along slowly.

Craddock watched the car out of sight. Then, his body bent almost double, he started a zigzag flight across the park, keeping close to the shelter of the thick pine trees that dotted the grass. He didn't dare go out through the gate but vaulted the hedge that lined the park. As soon as his feet touched the brick sidewalk, he ran fast and straight toward the main street of the city. He would be among people and that would give him a modicum of safety.

He slowed down in front of the garish marquee of the big moving picture house. The theatre would be warm and he'd be surrounded by people. He'd see to that. He edged toward the cashier's cage and reached in his trousers pocket for the quarter his mother had given him the day before. The pocket was empty. He drew out his hand and stared at his palm incredulously. He started a flurried search of his pockets. The quarter was gone. He must have lost it in the climb last night or in one of his falls. A woman pushed by him, staring at him curiously. Words formed on his lips and he uttered a burble of sound. The woman's hand flew to her mouth and she backed away from him.

A man's voice said, "Hey, what's wrong? Hey, what goes on here?"

Craddock stared up into a beefy face. His eyes blinked and he turned and walked away rapidly. He couldn't walk forever, he thought. Not with the cold wind lashing at him. He'd have to find some place to go. He stood still, shaking his head, trying to clear his thoughts. Then it came to him —the library. Why hadn't he thought of it before?

He felt almost calm now that he had a destination. He didn't have far to go anyway. Only a few blocks. Then he'd be safe. He kept his eyes on his feet, refusing to obey the impulse to look around, to see if he was followed. Even if Lassiter was on his trail, what could he do here in an open street?

The two-story brick building that was the library loomed up in front of him. He mounted the stone stairs to the heavy glass door and stepped inside the warm cor-

ridor. He hadn't realized he'd been holding his breath but now it came out with a little whooshing sound. He turned to the right toward the reference room. Sometimes he'd come here to study before he'd left school. It was better than home. The big flat-topped tables, the indirect lighting, the stacks of leather-jacketed books had always given him a sense of confidence.

He nodded to the stout, white-haired lady behind the desk and she smiled back at him. He went to the encyclopedia rack and chose a volume at random. It would be better if he pretended to be busy. Not until he'd been seated for some minutes did he remember his original plan to write out the events of the previous evening so that he could pass them to Jimmy Hay at the drugstore.

The paper was still in his jacket pocket though some of the sheets were rumpled and stained. He smoothed them out on the table and got out his pen. But when he tried to put the story down on paper, it didn't seem to make sense. Besides he didn't know where to start. If he just wrote down the facts, Jimmy would think he was nuts, probably he'd laugh in his face. He wrote a few lines, then crossed them out and started over again. Each attempt was worse than the one before. After awhile he crumpled up the two sheets of paper and dropped them in a waste-basket. He opened up the encyclopedia and stared down at it. The words on the page blurred before his eyes. The room was too warm and it made him drowsy. He cupped his chin in his palm and let the hushed silence creep over him.

He must have dozed. He came back to wakefulness with a jerk. He wondered how long he had slept. Outside darkness showed beyond the window pane and, as he watched, the street lights came on. The clock above the librarian's desk said a few minutes before six.

His earlier terror seemed unreal to him. He'd go home, get himself something to eat and go to bed. In the morning everything would be normal. He pushed back his chair and started to rise. Then he saw the man. He couldn't be sure, of course, that it was Steve Lassiter. But the shoulders, the big hand resting idly on the table, the slight arrogance of the man's bearing all reminded him of the man he'd first seen in the doorway of the Lassiter house.

The man didn't turn, didn't raise his eyes from the book in front of him, yet Craddock felt certain that he was aware of his every move.

Craddock hurried to the door. He didn't dare turn around but out of the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of the big man rising, moving leisurely in his direction. Craddock was in flight

again, down the marble steps, through the front door of the library and onto the street. There was no time to think out a plan of action. He ran instinctively without any sense of direction until the air rasped in his lungs and his legs felt leaden.

He stopped then, leaning against the side of a building, staring about him like a hunted animal. The street was stippled with light from store windows but there were so many dark places from which Steve Lassiter could be watching him. Standing still like this was making himself an easy target. He'd have to keep moving, no matter how tired he was.

In the block below he could see the blinding neon signs of Talbot's Drugstore. That was where Jimmy Hay worked. He'd better go back to his original plan, try to tell Jimmy his story. He walked along with his strange, jerky gait trying to keep to the shadows, ducking in and out of hallways.

The drugstore was too bright, with its fluorescent lights reflected on the tiles of the floor, the white formica of the long counter. The place was half full. A bunch of giggling high school girls crowded the booths and some older people were seated on the stools that lined the counter. A couple of boys were looking over the paperback books in the rack. Jimmy Hay was behind the counter, rushing back and forth with plates and glasses, calling out his orders.

Craddock stood just inside the door, feeling as though an arc light were playing upon him. There was no place to hide here. It was like being on a stage. A stool at the far end of the counter was empty. Craddock moved toward it, wrapped his lanky frame around it. This was the least conspicuous spot he could find but even so if Lassiter were combing the streets for him, he wouldn't be hard to locate.

Jimmy hustled by, a hot plate in either hand. He gave Craddock a quick grin but didn't stop. Craddock waited, drumming his fingers on the counter. How could he make Jimmy understand the urgency of his need. He dug out one of the crumpled sheets of paper from his pocket. He tried to write carefully, clearly, but his fingers were shaking and the letters went every which way. All the same he managed to get the message down in big block print —I GOT TO TALK WITH YOU. IT IS IMPORTANT. PLEASE, JIMMY.

Jimmy was approaching him now, his square freckled face lit up by a warm smile. He said, "Hi, kid. What'll it be, a coke?"

Craddock shook his head mutely and shoved the paper across the counter. Jimmy read it and the smile left him. He said, "Look, kid, you know better than that. I can't talk with you now. Not dur-

ing the rush hour. You come back later when things quiet down."

Craddock gurgled a protest but Jimmy wasn't even listening. Some more high school girls had come in and were goofing around, demanding all of Jimmy's attention. Craddock wanted to start yelling, to grab Jimmy's arm and make him listen. But he knew it wouldn't do any good. He'd just get bounced out of here, back onto the dark streets of the city where somewhere Steve Lassiter was on the prowl, looking for him.

He slumped over the counter, twisting his face away from the window, shielding it with his hand. A voice beside him startled him. Jimmy was back again. "Hey, kid, the boss is giving you the eye. You know he don't like you hanging around here. Why don't you broom off and come back in an hour?"

Craddock tried to protest but already Jimmy was halfway down the counter. He'd have to try again, make his message more urgent. He flattened out another sheet of paper, worked laboriously over it—JIMMY, I SAW A MURDER. YOU GOT TO BELIEVE ME.

It sounded cock-eyed, like something he'd dreamed up. Even Craddock could see that. But he'd have to give it a try. He straightened up, trying to draw Jimmy's attention but Jimmy had his back turned, was filling up cups of coffee from the big urn. Craddock tried to call his name but all that came out was a thin squeak that was lost in the babble of the girls.

A hand shot over his shoulder and landed on top of the crumpled paper. Craddock looked down at it, seeing the fine black hairs that matted the finger joints, the heavy gold signet ring. A starched blue cuff shoved just above the wrist and then there was the dark-gray tweed of the overcoat sleeve.

Craddock just sat staring at the hand, watching the fingers twist the paper around so that it could be read. Then the fingers closed, crumpling the sheet into a wedge, concealing it in a thick palm.

His eyes lifted slowly to the face of the man beside him. The man was Steve Lassiter, there was no doubt of that, but he didn't look particularly dangerous now. His face was broad and swarthy, with dark brown eyes and a neatly trimmed little mustache. His expression was one of amusement rather than threat. His eyes sparkled and his lips were parted, showing his overly white teeth.

Jimmy had moved up to the opposite side of the counter. "What'll it be?"

"A cup of coffee for me. One for my young friend, too." Lassiter's voice was rich, smooth, filled with assurance.

Jimmy raised a quizzical brow at Craddock but he turned away, drew the coffee and set it on the

counter. Craddock tried to say something then but all that he could get out was a burble of sound. Lassiter laughed and clapped him on the shoulder. It looked like a friendly gesture but the strong fingers bit painfully into the flesh of Craddock's upper arm. He gave a little whimper but no one seemed to notice.

He thought of throwing the steaming coffee into Lassiter's face and dashing for the door. But he couldn't bring himself to do it. Not when he looked into the man's eyes. The good humor had vanished from them and they had become dark pools of cruelty. Craddock sensed he wouldn't get far anyway. Lassiter's arm had dropped from his shoulder and now the strong fingers circled Craddock's wrist.

Lassiter's voice was pitched low but there was no mistaking the threat in it. "Don't try any tricks, kid, because if you do I'll snap your wrist like it was a match stick. Just tell me this. Who've you been talking to?"

Craddock tried to say, "No one. No one at all." But the spluttered words were unintelligible even to his own ears.

Lassiter gave a barking laugh. "Is that the best you can do, kid? Is that all you can say? No wonder you had to write it out. You didn't pass any notes to anyone else, did you?"

Craddock shook his head. Lassiter studied him. "I guess that's the truth or you wouldn't still be trying. So nobody knows about the redhead but me and you. Is that right?"

Craddock gulped and nodded.

Lassiter was smiling again. "That makes things real cozy. Just you and me. We've got nothing to worry about. Not if you're a smart boy. I tell you what. I'll pass you fifty bucks if you forget all about last night. What do you say? Is it a deal?"

Craddock's protest issued from his lips as a shrill whinny, but its meaning was unmistakable. Lassiter's eyes narrowed into slits. His fingers twisted on Craddock's wrist so that pain shot up the length of his arm. Tears filled Craddock's eyes, almost blinding him. He slumped forward and the pressure of the man's fingers eased.

Lassiter took a sip of his coffee and looked around. No one was paying any attention to them and no one was near enough to overhear. Still he kept his voice low-pitched but now he spoke in a confidential manner. "Look, kid, you got things all wrong. You must have got an eyeful through that window last night. I was a dope to forget about that torn shade but nothing very serious happened. The little redhead was trying her hand at blackmail so I slapped her around a bit. She fell and got a bump on her head. That's all there is to it. If you'd hung around a bit longer you'd

have seen her get up and me take her away in the car. I don't want to be tough, kid, but don't try pulling anything on me because if you do you're going to get roughed up worse than the redhead."

He hesitated but Craddock didn't raise his eyes. Lassiter's voice grew harsher. "You're a real crazy kid, passing around notes about murder. Do you think anybody's going to take your word against mine? You pull any more screwball tricks like this and they're going to lock you up and throw the keys away."

Lassiter had his wallet out and was fingering the bills when a shadow fell across the counter. A booming voice called out, "Well, well, Mr. Lassiter, I didn't know you was in town."

Craddock swung around and looked up into Officer Kelly's beet-red face, his thick lips and beady eyes. Lassiter thrust his wallet back into his pocket and smiled blandly at the policeman. "I just got in last night. I'm looking the old place over, thinking of opening it up again."

"That's good. That's fine. I hate to see the old estates get run down." His pig-like eyes slid to Craddock, squeezed in between Lassiter and the end of the counter. A look of puzzlement crossed over his face. He said, "Hi, kid. What you doing here?"

This was the time for Craddock to speak. Either he'd have to make Kelly understand somehow or he'd have to give up once and for all. He clawed at the policeman's sleeve and concentrated on the effort to speak clearly. But his lips seemed thicker than ever and none of the words would come out right. He pointed a finger at Lassiter. "He—he—I saw him murder—" The word "murder" was just a mumble. He tried it over again but Kelly wasn't even listening by this time; he'd turned back to Lassiter.

"Is this kid bothering you, Mr. Lassiter? He's a real weirdy, a trouble-maker. You say the word and I'll run him out of here."

Lassiter's manner was bland, kindly. "Nothing like that, Officer. I was just having a chat with the boy. You see, when I came home last night, I saw him prowling around the grounds, so I was just giving him a warning to keep out."

Kelly swung back to Craddock. "Prowling again, Craddock? Didn't I warn you if you didn't keep out of people's backyards I was going to throw the book at ya?"

Lassiter interrupted. "Don't be too hard on him, Officer. Anyone can see the boy's handicapped."

"Handicapped or not, I don't want no peeping Toms on my beat. You want to file a complaint against him for trespass?"

"No. I feel sorry for the boy."

Kelly shrugged. His hand went to Craddock's shoulder, and he pulled the boy upright. "Okay,

you heard what Mr. Lassiter said. He's giving you a break you don't deserve. So beat it now before he changes his mind. Go on. Scram."

He was beaten, Craddock realized. Even if he could make someone listen and understand his words, they'd never believe him. The police had him tabbed as a psycho already. Lassiter was right, if he tried to tell a story about murder they'd lock him up and wouldn't even bother to check.

He didn't try to say anything more but shambled through the shop, aware of all the eyes centered upon him, of the girls in the booth tittering at his scuttling walk, of Jimmy Hay's glance of pity. Out on the street, he turned at random, keeping close to the buildings to avoid the chill wind. At least he didn't have to run any more. Steve Lassiter would know that he was harmless, helpless, a guy who couldn't possibly be a menace to his safety.

He could go home now, get some sleep, forget all about Lassiter and the red-headed girl. But his footsteps weren't taking him home. They were carrying him back to the neighborhood of the old Lassiter estate.

He came to an enclosed stairway and sat down in the sheltered spot to think things over. Maybe Lassiter had been telling the truth about the girl. Maybe he'd just slapped her around and then taken her away. But that didn't make sense. Lassiter must have been frightened to spend the whole day trailing him. He'd been waiting outside Craddock's tenement when he got up, had followed him to the park, the library, the drugstore. He wouldn't have done that unless he'd had something serious to hide. Something as serious as murder.

Lassiter had made one mistake, the same mistake that everybody made about Craddock. Lassiter thought that because he couldn't talk and walked funny and looked like a bean pole that he had to be stupid. A stir of anger passed through Craddock's body, warming him up, giving him a desire for action, a sense of confidence. There had to be a way to prove that he was right, that the girl had been killed.

The warmth died out as suddenly as it had sprung to life. If the girl was dead, Lassiter wouldn't dare to let Craddock wander about free. No matter how stupid he thought Craddock might be, he couldn't afford to have a firsthand witness to his crime. Everything that had happened back in the drugstore had been an act, a preliminary to another murder. And this time Craddock would be the victim.

There was no safety anywhere. Not unless he could find some actual proof of what he had seen. And there was only one proof—the girl's body. How could Lassiter have disposed of her? Maybe he hadn't. Maybe she was still ly-

ing where she had fallen. Lassiter must have spent almost every minute of his time tracking Craddock down. So maybe he hadn't got rid of her yet. There was one way to find out. To go back to the balcony where he'd been last night. If he could see the girl, maybe he could persuade Jimmy to return with him after the drugstore was closed. Jimmy must have sensed there was something wrong, that Craddock wouldn't go off the deep end over nothing.

He still had a chance to beat Steve Lassiter. Excitement walled up within him, making him forget his bruised body, his chattering teeth. It even drove away the fear for awhile. The Lassiter place wasn't far away, only a few blocks. He swung along, moving fast, until he was in sight of the bleak old house. He crossed the street to look the place over. Trees blocked off his view of most of the house but as far as he could see all the windows were dark. The gate was closed and he guessed that it was locked but getting into the grounds from the front provided no problem. The wall there was low enough for him to leap it and there was hardly anyone around on such a chill night to see him.

His nerves were tingling and he knew that if he stopped to think he'd abandon his plan. He forced blankness into his mind, closing off the thoughts of danger. He started across the street and he was over the low wall before he fully realized what he was doing. The grass was thick and silent beneath his feet. He stopped to listen. No sounds except the crickets and the muted roar of traffic on the highway half a mile beyond.

He steered clear of the driveway, skirting the house in the opposite direction. He continued walking rapidly, knowing that his resolution would fail him if he hesitated. The moon was bright and he had no difficulty finding a path that sloped to the back of the house. Pretty soon he could see the garage casting its black shadow across the lawn.

In his own mind the balcony had become a harbor of refuge, the one spot where he would be immune from danger. He started running, tripped on the tangled roots of a shrub, fell, got up and then he was at the base of the rickety stairway. He scrambled up to the balcony and lay there panting. A sense of exaltation passed through him in spite of his mounting panic. For the moment he forgot his reason for coming here in the blind pleasure of having achieved his goal.

He peered through the banister, searching for the window through which he had seen the girl. The window was dark but he could see the shade pulled down as it had been the night before. He could even see the dark triangular patch of the tear. But that

was all. His exaltation died as suddenly as it had risen and was replaced with a numbing dread. He was right back in the same position that he'd been last night. Only this time it was worse. If Steve Lassiter should spot him now there'd be no bargaining. It would be curtains for sure.

There was nothing more to see. What he ought to do was get out fast. But he couldn't force his limbs to move.

Despite the dim glow from one of the windows on the lower floor, the house had the air of being deserted. But Steve Lassiter must be close at hand because Craddock could see the black hulk of his car parked in the shadow of the portico. As Craddock watched a light flicked on in the cellar. He sucked in his breath and crouched lower against the banister.

Something was going on in the house. If he only had the nerve to explore, he might find out what it was. But he didn't want to move any closer to Steve Lassiter. As long as he remained here on the balcony, he told himself, he was safe. All the same, he knew that was crazy thinking. There was danger for him here, danger everywhere unless he could put Lassiter behind bars. He'd have to get a grip on himself, or he'd spend the rest of his life running.

He got up slowly and tiptoed down the stairs. He didn't make much noise crossing the lawn but even the tiny sounds of a twig snapping, of gravel beneath his feet, seemed to explode in the chilly silence. When he reached the window he found it was coated thickly with dust. All he could see was a vague blur beyond. He squatted down on his hands and knees and pressed his face against the pane. Steve Lassiter was only a few feet away. Craddock jerked back in sudden terror, losing his balance, almost falling over. The cinders beneath the window scraped his palm and made a soft crunching sound.

He would have fled then but he was paralyzed with fear. What if the sound had alerted Lassiter? What if he were leaping up the stairs now in pursuit of the trespasser? Craddock had to know. He pressed his face against the window again. Lassiter was right where he'd been before, his back turned to Craddock. He'd taken off his coat and hat and even his jacket. The sleeves of his blue shirt were rolled up above the elbows.

It took Craddock a few moments to realize what the man was doing. He was standing in front of the open door of a tool closet. He lifted something in his hands, then put it back again. He crouched low, then rose. He turned then and Craddock saw what he had picked up—a spade. Even from where Craddock watched it looked rusty. Lassiter ran his fingers along the edge of the spade and

his shoulders gave a little shrug. He leaned the spade against the wall and looked back in the closet. He picked up something else, then tossed it down again.

Lassiter swung around slowly and it seemed to Craddock that his eyes rested directly on the window. Craddock cringed away. When he peered through the window again, Lassiter was halfway across the cellar, walking slowly, as though wrapped in thought. Craddock watched him until he disappeared up the stairs.

The spade was still propped against the wall. It could only mean one thing. Craddock had been right after all. The girl's body was here in the house and Lassiter was planning to bury it. But where? Would he dig a grave in the cellar? Or somewhere on the grounds? Or would he take her out in the country in his car? No matter what he planned, he'd have to come back for the spade. This was the place to watch because once he knew where the body was he'd force Jimmy or somebody to help him dig it up.

Lassiter was gone for a long time. To Craddock it seemed as though hours passed although common sense told him that it wasn't more than fifteen or twenty minutes. Then suddenly Lassiter was on the stairs and the girl was in his arms. Her face seemed to be snuggled up against the man's chest so that all Craddock could see was the mass of her red hair, the smooth skin of her back and the careless drape of her dark-green dress.

Her skirt swayed across her slender legs, giving the illusion of movement. Had he been mistaken? Could the girl still be alive?

At the foot of the stairs, Lassiter stopped. A battered old couch stood close by. Lassiter dropped the girl on it. As he stepped back, the girl toppled to one side, then rolled to the floor, her body landing in a strange stiff posture, face downward on the grimy cement. Lassiter stood looking at her for a moment before moving away. Craddock didn't notice where he went. His face was glued to the window, his eyes wide with horror. He was unable to tear his gaze away from the gruesome sight.

He was still staring through the window when a trifling noise made him look up. Lassiter was towering above him. Craddock couldn't see much of his face, only a pale blur in the darkness and the glint of his eyes. But he didn't need to see any more to know that he was close to death.

Lassiter's voice was almost a whisper. "You couldn't leave it alone, could you, kid? Okay, so now you know. What good's it going to do you?"

Craddock inched away, falling backward on his elbows. He would have cried out if he could but no sound would come. He scrabbled crab-wise on the cinders,

unaware of anything except the black fear that filled him.

Lassiter grabbed for him then. His heavy, spatulate fingers clasped the leather collar of Craddock's windbreaker, forcing him up. Craddock's foot rose instinctively and Lassiter's tug added momentum to the clumsy, kicking movement. Craddock felt the jarring impact of his heel on Lassiter's groin. The man uttered a sharp cry and his fingers released their hold of Craddock's collar. Both of them went crashing backward to the earth.

Craddock was up first. Lassiter had fallen so that the light sliced across his face. It was contorted with pain. Lassiter rolled over, struggled upward, bracing himself against the wall. Craddock spun about and began to run. Too late he realized he was racing in the wrong direction, down the slope toward the high wall that bound the end of the grounds. He didn't dare turn back toward the driveway. Somewhere amid the tall matted grass, the overgrown shrubs, the shadows of the maples, surely there had to be a place to hide.

He rounded the garage. There was a tiny grove of trees beyond. He ran toward them, stumbled and fell. He lay still, stunned. He was in a narrow ditch, half filled with leaves still damp from last night's rain. Water soaked into his clothing but he dared not move.

He could hear the clump of footsteps, Lassiter's muttered curses. Craddock buried his face in his arms so that the whiteness of it might not reveal his hiding place. He remained taut, motionless, scarcely daring to breathe. The footsteps drew closer, then passed him by. Lassiter would think he'd headed for the grove. Wait just a little longer until Lassiter was a safe distance away, then leap up and run like mad. Run along the driveway, leap the front wall and escape to the street. Keep on running then, because you'd never know how long Lassiter would be on your heels. Never stop. Run for the rest of your life. Craddock couldn't help the whimper, the little cry of despair that forced its way past his lips.

Lassiter must have heard because the footfalls stopped and there was nothing but silence. Then the harsh whisper seemed to echo all about him.

"Come on, Craddock, get up. I know you're there."

There was a hypnotic quality in the whisper. Craddock felt the need to rise, to go cringing on his knees to the older man.

"I can wait here forever, Craddock, if I have to."

Craddock fought the impulse to give himself up. Sounds echoed here in the deserted grounds. Lassiter couldn't know where he was, not exactly.

The man's voice took on an eery, sing-song note. "Craddock,

Craddock, where are you, Craddock?"

Craddock sunk his teeth into the leather arm of his windbreaker to hold back his cries. How had Lassiter learned his name? Kelly must have told him. Now the night seemed to echo from every direction. "Craddock—Craddock—Craddock."

It wasn't only Lassiter who was calling him but all the people who had ever tormented him. The boys who hung around Talbot's store. The giggling girls in the schoolyard. Officer Kelly. Eyes must be watching him too. Maybe Lassiter was standing right above him. He rolled over and stared up into the sky.

The voice had stopped. When Lassiter spoke again his tones were wheedling. "I won't hurt you, Craddock. We can get together, talk things over. You don't need to be scared of me. I'm your friend, Craddock. Listen, I won't even turn you over to Officer Kelly for prowling. I'll be nice to you. You can trust me, Craddock."

He'd heard it all before, Craddock thought. Tommy, Kelly, his teachers, all used these wheedling tones when they wanted something from him. Talking down to him as though he were an idiot. Something hardened inside of him. Did Lassiter think he'd fall for such a stupid trick? He'd outwit Lassiter. Then he'd run, the way he'd always run. Faster than Lassiter. Faster than anybody. Nobody'd ever catch him.

There was a faint scratching sound, then a pale glow that disappeared almost immediately. Matches. Lassiter was striking matches. Craddock hadn't thought of that. There wouldn't be much time left. In minutes, Lassiter would spot him. And if he were lying here in the ditch what chance would he have to escape the man's crushing fingers?

He leaped to his feet and started to run. He heard Lassiter's bellow, the trampling of his feet. His loping stride carried him to the edge of the garage, across the strip of shadow, back to the lawn. The driveway and freedom stretched ahead of him. How close behind him was the man? He tried to listen but his grating breath, the clatter of his shoes and the thump of his heart blended into a symphony of fear that obliterated every other sound.

He couldn't believe it when he saw the figure ahead of him, rushing toward him. It couldn't be Lassiter. Then he realized what had happened. Lassiter had cut across the front of the garage to head him off from the gate and the driveway. He almost crashed into the man, but pivoted and swung away just in time. Lassiter's hand clawed at his windbreaker but the damp leather slipped through his fingers and Craddock was free once more.

Now he must run blindly, with-

out plan, back toward the high wall that offered no escape. The man was right behind him and there was no time to think of anything but how to escape the snatching fingers. He ran, arms flapping, his chest forward, his head down. Bushes whipped at him and the low-hanging branches of a tree lashed his face. He ran in a half-circle among the trees with Lassiter never far behind. If he tripped, even stumbled, he'd be through. He'd have no chance against Lassiter.

But it was Lassiter whose foot tangled with the thick vines. He fell heavily with a grunt and a curse. Craddock should have leaped over him back to the clear space that led to the drive. But Craddock couldn't check his headlong flight and the angle of the wall loomed up ahead. He was caught in a trap and as he swung about, he saw that Lassiter was on his feet again, not running any longer, but walking slowly to where Craddock stood with his back against the wall.

Craddock sidled into the shadow of a tree. The leaves brushed against his forehead. He knew what he had to do then. His hands reached for the thick branch and he pulled himself up awkwardly, his thin body dangling. Lassiter rushed him but Craddock's leg lashed out, caught the man on the chest, sent him reeling back.

Lassiter didn't try to stop him a second time but stood in the pale moonlight just beyond the tree's shadow, watching.

"Come on down, boy," he called softly. "You can't stay up there all night and I'm sure going to be waiting for you."

Craddock pulled himself up higher, pressing close to the gnarled trunk. Lassiter leaned down, picked up a stone and flung it. The heavy foliage deflected the stone and it went clattering against the wall. From the street beyond Craddock could hear the hum of a car, slowing for the intersection. If he could only call out now, help might come. He opened his mouth and the soft burbling sounds spilled out. He choked them off and let the stillness settle about him.

The sky was clouding up and as the night grew darker, he could scarcely make out the man's squat figure, patiently waiting below him. He clutched the trunk of the tree more tightly and felt the thin sobs wrack his body. There had to be a means of escape, some way out. He crept a little higher, peering up into the sky through the lattice-work of leaves and branches. The stone wall was more than twenty feet high at this point. Could he work his way out onto one of the high branches? Make a leap for the wall? Cling to it?

Even if he were able to hoist himself to the top of the wall, how could he get down? He remembered his desperate climb of

yesterday. He had had the gate to help him then, the projecting cornice, the ragged stones to give him hand holds. But here the wall would be smooth, a sharp descent to the bricks and concrete of the sidewalk. He'd have to try it though. It was his only chance.

The branch dipped and swayed as he edged out upon it. He let out a startled little squeal. Beneath him, he heard the movements of the man, coming closer, but he could not see him through the leaves.

He'd have to go higher, try again. He inched back, groped his way upward, then moved with infinite caution along the swaying branch. He was close to the wall now, only a few inches more and he could reach out for it. But that would mean releasing his grip. He'd have to make the leap all in one motion. He lay along the branch, his body drenched in sweat despite the chill night air.

He'd count to ten and when he reached that number he'd make the try. The numbers ticked away in his mind but when he reached ten his body refused to react as he wanted it to. Perhaps he could move closer, even an inch would help. He wriggled along the branch. Then he heard the ominous crack of dried wood. Time was running out and with a sudden desperate effort he flung himself forward. His hands caught the sharp edge of the wall. A rough stone, an uneven spot, gave him a grip. His body dangled loosely against the parapet, but he pulled himself up until finally he straddled the coping.

The empty street glistened darkly beneath and the wind whipped at his face. Blocks away the headlights of a car cut a swathe of light through the darkness. Other than that there was no movement. It was as though a dead city lay beneath him. Dizziness seized him and with it the almost uncontrollable impulse to fling himself to the bricks below. Descent was impossible here. He'd have to squirm his way along to the big gate. He flattened out on the ledge, pulling himself along with his hands, his chest scraping on the jagged surface.

He had gone only a few feet when a taunting voice drifted up to him. "You can't make it, boy. You're going to fall. You're going to be killed." Lassiter, standing somewhere in the shadows, was mocking him as the boys had mocked him the day before.

Then far away footsteps echoed, only a light tapping at first but growing louder, like the steady rising tattoo of a drum. A figure emerged into the circular pool of light cast by the street-lamp at the far end of the block. Even from here, Craddock could recognize the man as Officer Kelly. If he could only call out, he'd be safe. He raised himself a little and gibbering animal cries left his throat, only to mingle with the whine of

the wind, the crackling night sounds.

Kelly stopped at the corner and his head twisted from side to side scanning the streets. If he'd only look upward, up to the wall where Craddock's body made an elongated silhouette against the coping. Craddock propped himself up and raised one arm high in an awkward waving motion.

"Craddock!" The voice on the lawn below was sharp, commanding. Craddock turned involuntarily. Lassiter was there. Enough moonlight shone on him so that Craddock could see the glitter of his eyes, in the white patch of his face.

"Craddock!" Lassiter called again. His hand went back, then shot forward. Craddock didn't see the stone, only felt the shattering blow on his chest. Instinctively his body jerked backward. Too late his hand clawed at the wall's edge. He was going back, back into the darkness, then falling, head downward, whirling and twisting. The scream that he could never utter before came rushing through his lips, a shrill piercing shriek that was broken off by a sickening crash as Craddock's body struck the sidewalk.

Officer Kelly whirled at the sound. For a moment he was motionless, staring incredulously in the direction of the scream. Then he gave a shout and ran with ponderous speed to the spot where Craddock had fallen. He knelt beside the broken figure, swearing softly.

The Lassiter home was dark when Kelly passed. No sense going in there anyway. Even if Steve Lassiter was home, he'd have no telephone and the first thing Kelly had to do was notify his chief, then summon an ambulance. The Willoughby house opposite was lit up and he went in there to use the phone.

When he came back, a light shone in an upstairs window of the old mansion. So Steve was there after all. Kelly had better route him out, get him to identify the body. He gave a halloo and a few minutes later Steve came to the front door. He had on trousers, leather bedroom slippers, a corded red silk dressing gown.

Kelly gave him the story fast and straight. After all, there wasn't any time to waste. He'd have to get back to the kid before somebody stumbled across his body and started having hysterics. Steve caught on quick. He didn't ask any questions, just went along with Kelly.

The wail of the siren could be heard in the distance by the time they reached the kid. Steve dropped down on one knee beside him, then averted his face. He stood up, stripped off the dressing gown and laid it over the boy. He was naked from the waist up. Kelly, watching him, saw a tremor pass through his body. Steve Lassiter was okay, he thought, a

real solid citizen in spite of all the gossip that had made the rounds when his mother had been found murdered.

Steve turned toward him. "Maybe there was something I could have done for the boy. Maybe—"

Kelly cut him off. "He was prowling your place, wasn't he? I tell you the kid had itchy fingers. He takes a tumble and kills himself. So what? Forget it."

Steve's eyes dropped to his feet. A loose rock showed under the edge of the robe. With one slippered foot he sent it spinning into the gutter.

Kelly didn't say anything more. The ambulance had swung around the corner and he stepped out to the curb to signal it. The next fifteen minutes were too confused to leave room for thought about Lassiter. But when the ambulance finally rolled away, Kelly saw that Steve was still there, standing by the wall, shivering. Hell, the guy would probably catch his death of cold, maybe get pneumonia. He should have gone up to the house long ago. Why should a big shot like Lassiter have to be bothered with a no-good little punk like Craddock? The kid had never been anything but a trouble-maker, a prowler, a peeping Tom. He'd probably planned a bit of petty thieving tonight. Maybe something worse. What the hell, it wasn't such a bad thing that the kid had bumped off. He was getting screwier all the time. You couldn't tell what a kid like that would do, he thought angrily. Give him time enough and he'd probably end up by committing murder.

PROGRESS?

The Stanley Stamp Company *Newsletter* (Vancouver, Canada) for March 1958, reports that they "were just reading about a woman who shot her husband. Time was when a woman merely wanted to reform a man. These days she wants to make an angel out of him!"

surprise

by . . . Frank Kiefer

He told Vicari to shut up and to keep driving. All he could see was that the guy had money—and a car.

Us LITTLE guys, we need protection, you know? Seems like there's always someone out to pluck us jockey weights. Makes it kind of tough sometimes unless you got some kind of protection.

As for me, I've always got eyes for a bodyguard. Good one's are hard to find these days. Plush times. Most of the brainy guys are in business for themselves. Not the goons, of course, but who wants a goon? Not me, man.

That's why when I see this big, good-looking, blond-haired kid standing alongside the road with his thumb hanging out I give him a long look. It happens when I'm buzzing back to LA after a little vacation trip to Lake Tahoe. I'm steaming down the Freeway just out of Sacramento when I spot him.

Right away I'm impressed. He looks like he just stepped out of a physical culture ad.

I play a hunch and cut over to the left lane, cop a u-turn at a crossing and drive back. He's still there, no suitcase or nothing, just him and his muscles, which are visible to the naked eye because he wears only a T-shirt and blue

Californian Frank Kiefer reports on one of the problems faced by little guys—long before a French Emperor gave his name to a not always warranted generalization. Vicari had been looking for a bodyguard like this youngster. It was too bad the boy was so impatient. That was foolish.

denim pants. This may be a break, I tell myself.

I cross over again and stop. The big kid climbs in and right away reaches into his pants pocket and pulls out a rod, which he sticks in my gut. It looks like my hunch might pay off. I smile and drive on down the Freeway.

We say nothing for a couple miles, and when he sees I don't plan trouble he pulls the rod from my side and I reach for a butt in my inside coat pocket. The weapon jabs me again and I smile and shrug and tell him I'm just after a smoke. Out comes the butt and he relaxes. I like this kid, he's alert.

More and more I think he might be just what I'm looking for.

"My name's Vicari," I say, wondering if the name will mean anything to him. "Sicilian," I say, "but I come from LA. That's where I'm headed now. How about yourself?"

I give him this thumb-nail sketch in hopes he'll open up.

"Stow it, runt," he growls. "Just drive."

I flash my big smile. "Don't get sore," I say, "you're calling the play."

The rod jabs me again, hard, so I stow it. But I like this kid more and more. Before the day's over I figure he'll be real thankful I picked him up. I reach for another smoke and see from the corner of my eye that he still tenses up a little, but not as much as before.

I light up off the other butt, then say, "Like I started to tell you, no sense us being on the outs, man. I'll take you where you want to go. I'll even stake you."

He squints down at me and twists his lip. "I told you to clam up!"

That's all he says, and I can hardly keep from smiling at the way he puts it over. Man, this guy's mean.

"Turn right at the next cutoff," he says suddenly.

I frown. He's caught me unawares, and I hope he's not thinking what I think he's thinking. By this time I really like the kid. More and more he looks like the type I'm after and I don't want him to spoil it now.

We drive up the paved cutoff a couple miles, then he tells me to turn off onto a dirt road. It angles over to a row of trees growing by a creek and he says to pull over and stop.

He takes a quick look around, then says, "Get out." He jabs the rod at me again.

"Now hold on a shake, man," I say, "I could do you some good, ya' know? Maybe I best tell you who I am."

He scowls at me. "Who gives a damn? All I care is that you've got what I need—a nice car and money. Too bad you're such a runt. I could use those flashy

clothes you're wearing, too. Now, get out!"

I see I've got to talk fast. This kid's in too much of a hurry. "Slow down, man. Don't do nothin' you're going to regret. I could use a guy like you. I ain't kidding, man. Don't my name mean—"

"Out!"

I shrug and flick my cig out the window. "Okay, pal, but I'm trying to give you a real break."

I climb out of the car. I still like how this guy operates and hope I can sway him to my way of thinking, but I'm beginning to wonder. He don't take nothing from no one—even Vicari. He tells me to get over by the creek bank. I go.

"Turn around and stand on the edge," he orders.

"Sure," I say, but before turning I reach for another smoke. "How's about a last smoke, man?" I ask. "That's the least you can do after all you're getting from me."

He twists his mouth into what he must've thought was a smile. "Okay," he says, "but I can't promise you'll get to finish it you know."

A sense of humor, too, this kid. I like him a lot, see? He's just what I'm looking for, I know it.

Well, that's how it goes sometimes.

I reach inside like I'm going for a cig, but instead of coming out with a butt I spring my holster and blast the kid right through my sport jacket. Man, was he surprised!

LIBEL TO CALL YOU DIPSOMANIAC?

Though death is no discredit, the manner of it may, of course, be unfortunate. To say that a man has died of drink—when there is documentary evidence that he is alive and has conquered the habit—is libel. A noted London art gallery found this out in 1934 when a French painter was described in a catalogue as a "confirmed dipsomaniac" who "at intervals throughout his life was placed under restraint," and as having died that year.

A man with the same surname had died, but not the painter who—very much alive—started proceedings against the gallery.

While the catalogue itself was withdrawn, the gallery defended the description of the painter as accurate, as indeed it would have been *at one time*. It was felt, however, that "a man's past is not to be identified with his present" and that the description was not justified if the painter had been cured. When the case finally came to trial, it was announced that the attention of the defendants had in the meantime been drawn to a book published in France, several years earlier, confirming that the painter had indeed conquered the drinking habit. A public apology—but no damages—was requested, and counsel for the defendants was glad to make it plain that Monsieur X was very much "alive and active in his old profession."

the guilty man

by . . . Melville Davisson Post

THERE is something dreadful about any tribunal that has our fate in its hands.

Fate is a prerogative of divinity, and when it is usurped in our human affairs, it brings with it the awe of the Ultimate Authority behind the world. The human tribunal that assumes it may be formal or lax. It does not matter. From its purpose it becomes a dread tribunal.

The Grand Jury sitting in this western county of Virginia was a mere group of its ordinary freeholders, selected by lot to maintain the peace and dignity of the State; a group that one might have herded out of any county fair or any political assembly. But when it sat with closed doors in the courthouse to present the formal charge of murder against a citizen, it became a dread thing, that impressed the people with a solemnity from which they could not escape.

One of them had murdered Pickney. Was it the nephew who had fled, or was the truth not yet known?

The tense interest of the tragedy that assembled it lay about the courthouse. It was a special Grand Jury and concerned with a single issue—the murder of Dunmore Pickney.

Melville Davisson Post, himself at one time a lawyer, is perhaps best known for his stories about that remarkable Virginia attorney, Colonel Braxton. Post, who lived in West Virginia, was interested in the broader aspects of life, in politics, in the South he knew and loved, and in its problems.

From: THE SILENT WITNESS.
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There was little mystery in the identity of the assassin. By his act he had practically confessed it . . . flight is confession. The nephew, Richard Pickney, had disappeared on the night of the tragedy. He had crossed the border out of Virginia . . . ridden through the gap of the mountains into Maryland.

The sovereignty of the State required a sort of ambassadorial procedure to bring him back to face his crime, and indictment by the Grand Jury and an application to the governor of Maryland for his extradition. And so the first step in the procedure was on its way.

Dunmore Pickney was at the end of life when he was murdered. He was one of the wealthy citizens of the county and of a family long established in Virginia. He had no wife nor child. The two nephews who lived with him were his only heirs. He had disposed of his estate in a testament long written and locked up in a lawyer's strong box. And when it was unfolded after the tragedy these two nephews were the sole beneficiaries of that testament. It was read out in the courtroom, and it was a gruesome thing to hear the language of affection, in set legal terms, passing on what he had painfully gathered together in life, with tender consideration, to the assassin who had stabbed him in the back.

It gave one a shudder of the soul to hear it.

Dunmore Pickney, in his life, was reserved and distant and, from his manner, with no tender feeling in him. He seemed to suffer the presence of his two nephews in his house, and to treat them with no particular regard. But written into the paper to be opened at his death there was a profound feeling of affection.

And it seemed expressed in greater measure toward the nephew, Richard Pickney, the son of a younger brother . . . this Richard Pickney who had fled away into Maryland after the detestable murder of his uncle.

The other nephew, Joseph Barnes, was indicated in the testament in more formal terms, as a matter of the customary verbiage of a legal paper rather than a feeling in the decedent.

And yet it was Barnes who had maintained the obsequious manner toward his uncle, humored him and praised his foibles, labored to cultivate his favor. He had been careful and pretentious, and was never to be flushed into anger by old Dunmore's irritable temper.

The difference in the men was racial. The younger nephew had the hot, wild temper of the blood. The other had taken the nature of his father. He was not a Pickney. Perhaps a recognition of this fact lay at the base of the favoritism of the elder Pickney for the nephew Richard.

The two nephews lived with

Dunmore Pickney in his house. It was a long, old brick house of the early type, with two wings sitting at right angles. Dunmore Pickney lived in one wing of it, as though in a separate domicile, and the two nephews on the upper and lower floors of the other wing.

Richard Pickney had borrowed a considerable sum of money from his uncle. He was careless of money, and he found no way to repay it. The uncle had several times remonstrated with him on this careless habit, and there followed, usually, temper and hot words. There had been a violent quarrel on the night of the tragedy.

Barnes said that later in the evening Richard had come to him in his room on the upper floor of the wing where he resided. He was in a violent passion, fired with a deadly resentment against his uncle, but also, Barnes thought, for some additional reason which the man did not make clear.

He was in a wild passion and his expressions were violent. He would "settle with the old devil on this night," he continued to declare in his wild talk. He borrowed then a sum of money from Barnes, writing out to him an assignment of his inheritance in pledge for it, and, still in his anger, went down the steps and along the wing of the house to old Dunmore's room; later Barnes heard him ride away in the night.

The following morning Barnes found old Dunmore Pickney lying in his library, fallen forward on the table. He had been stabbed to death; a carving knife from the kitchen of the house had been the weapon. It was lying beside the dead man where the assassin had dropped it after the murderous assault.

On the table and about the room were the papers of the dead man where they had been searched and scattered. Bloody fingers had ransacked the man's body, his pocketbook, and his papers, as though in search of some particular one.

Barnes said he was appalled when he went into the library on this morning. His uncle had not come out and, in some concern, he had gone into his wing of the house to seek him. He found the door to the library open and this disorder of tragedy before him as he entered. He was, as I have written here, appalled. And he touched nothing. The only thing he did was to let in the light, so that he could see if his uncle were in fact dead on the table. The blinds to the room were all pulled down and he raised one of them. It was the only thing that he touched in the room.

He saw at once that his uncle was dead, and he was careful to leave every evidence precisely as it was, for the authorities to see. These statements of the man were all established as true, and they

bore out the hypothesis of the crime.

Richard Pickney had evidently "settled with" old Dunmore in a murderous fashion; searched through his papers for the note he held, secured it, and with it and the money borrowed from Barnes, fled the State.

Colonel Braxton had been employed by the State to conduct this inquisition before the Grand Jury; not perhaps for the reason that there was any doubt about the identity of the author of this deed, or any legal puzzle to be untangled. But the procedure for extradition was formal and should be conducted with a nice precision.

It was a summer afternoon, and hot.

The Grand Jury room in the courthouse was on the second story, behind the courtroom, and looked out into the distant hills and the far-off river.

No air moved, and the windows were open. There was little form attending this assembly. The Grand Jury sat about in chairs near the windows and around the room. There was nothing on this table but some articles that he had brought in: some sheets of foolscap paper, a pen and ink, a worn law book, and a long, round package carefully wrapped in newspaper. Otherwise, the table was empty. The inquisition had proceeded at some length, the preliminary inquiry concluded. There remained only the chief witness, Barnes, to be examined, and his story of the matter was well known. It had been repeated, considered, and found to fit into the evidential facts. The story had not varied, and in all its details Barnes had been clear and definite. He waited outside in the courtroom to be called. The Grand Jury were now ready to hear what he had to say and return their indictment against the absent assassin.

But Colonel Braxton appeared, strangely, in some indecision. He seemed in no hurry to conclude the hearing. He idled before the table, as though he awaited the arrival of some event.

And yet, when an event dramatic and unexpected did arrive, he seemed no less amazed than the men about him.

There came a knocking on the door.

When the sheriff opened it, a girl entered, a slender, dark-haired girl, with a white face. She stood bravely in the door, but her mouth trembled. The girl was torn by some tragic thing, but the spirit in her could not be whipped into servility.

The sheriff was embarrassed; uncertain what to do.

Colonel Braxton rose. His voice, when he spoke, was gentle and courteous. He indicated a chair beside him at the table.

"Come in," he said.

The girl did not at once reply.

She looked vaguely about her, at Colonel Braxton, at the group of men now standing about the room. Then she spoke, her voice tense with emotion.

"I have something to tell," she said.

Colonel Braxton went around the table to the door. But the girl spoke again before he reached her.

"I did it!" she said.

It was a sort of cry instead of three simple words; something ravaged out of a tortured spirit. There was no expression in the girl's face in harmony with these words, and no attitude of manner that accorded with them. They were like words uttered by a person in dementia, or one speaking at the dominance of something outside one's self.

There was a strained silence. No one moved or spoke. Colonel Braxton alone seemed to grasp something of the significance of the thing. He went over to the girl, took her hand, and led her to the chair beside his own at the table. He was very quiet and gentle with her, as one with an overwrought child.

Everybody knew the girl—for it was a community of old families established in the soil. Her father's land adjoined the estate of this dead man, and the nephew Richard had grown up with her, a boy and girl together. The neighbors looked to an ultimate marriage, and the joining of the lands when old Dunmore Pickney should have gone to the graveyard and the inheritance he vested in this nephew.

The men about the room regarded her in wonder. And softly, as before the dead, they went back to their places and left the delicate conduct of this affair to the attorney.

He managed with a gentle sympathy.

"Yes, Miss Millie," he said. "Yes . . . Yes."

But he made no comment and he put no inquiry. The girl was at the very point of breaking. Her emotion must have its way with her and its time. It could not be hurried. He sat there at the table, her hand in his big palm, and waited. . . . And presently she wept.

With a sort of abandoned gesture she flung herself forward on the table, her arms around her face. The burst of emotion flowed out, and her body, tense in its restraint, relaxed.

No one moved. The low sobbing of the girl was the only sound. The silence seemed to extend to the fields and the river in the distance. The afternoon sun entering through the open windows lay on the floor, and the vague noises from the city crept up as from a world apart.

Presently the paroxysm of emotion passed. The girl sat up, putting back her hair. The flood in her had flowed out. But it did not

leave her a relaxed figure. There was courage in her, and she faced what she had come to meet.

She looked about at the men in the jury-room; but when she spoke, she addressed the lawyer. And she repeated the words she used when she had entered.

"I killed him!"

"With the knife, Miss Millie?" said the lawyer.

The girl hesitated.

"It was the same thing, Colonel." She paused and then presently went on, as though leaving a hiatus in the story.

"I told Richard what his uncle had said to me . . . that he was a wild youth, and I must give him up . . . then it all happened. . . . You see . . . I did it."

The girl looked about the room with a high face.

"But Richard did not rob his uncle . . . he did not." She took a letter out of the bosom of her dress, and a paper from it.

"There is the note Mr. Pickney held," she said.

Colonel Braxton took the note and examined it carefully. It was in the form she said, a note of hand for the money the nephew had borrowed.

The Grand Jury gathered around the table and looked down at the paper. It was beyond question the note truly. . . . But what of that?

Did not the hypothesis of guilt, on which they had assembled to find an indictment against Richard Pickney, contemplate precisely this order of events? He had killed the man with the concealed knife that he had carried in with him, searched through his papers for the note, and with the money that he had borrowed, and the note, he had fled away across the border to Maryland. . . . Here was the note, sent back in his letter to his sweetheart. . . . But was it evidence of innocence? . . . Was it not rather evidence of guilt?

For some time there was utter silence . . . a dreadful silence that extended through the room like a pressure. The whole Grand Jury had gathered about the table, around the girl and the lawyer.

Finally the foreman spoke. He looked at the letter in the girl's hand.

"Miss Millie knows where he is."

He seemed to avoid, as from a sense of delicacy, a mention of the assassin's name. And he spoke softly, addressing Colonel Braxton.

"Yes," replied the lawyer. "She knows where he is."

"You will ask her where he is?"

"No," he said. "I shall not ask her."

The foreman shifted his weight from one foot to the other. He made a little embarrassed gesture.

"We've got to know where he is."

"Perhaps," replied the lawyer.

The big foreman repeated the word.

"Perhaps!" he said. "Why, Colonel, we've got to get after him."

The girl sprang up at that. She stood defiant, with her head thrown back.

"Why do you have to get him?" she cried. "You have got me. Hang me!"

The foreman stepped back. His face took on an expression of incredulity; of wonder.

"We couldn't hang you, Miss Millie!"

"And why can't you hang me?" cried the girl. "I'm the guilty one. . . . I'm the cause of it all . . . and the one who is the cause of a thing is the guilty one. . . . I did it all. I told him what his uncle said . . . that he was an idle spendthrift and I must not marry him. . . . I told him . . . and so it was I who put the resentment in him . . . the fury in him against his uncle. . . . Don't you see? . . . Can't you see it was my fault? . . . that I did it?"

She went on, her voice clear, vibrant, in a splendid defiance.

"He was in a good humor when he came to me that evening . . . he was gentle like a woman when he came to me . . . he loved me; he wanted me to marry him . . . and I meant to do it. . . . But . . . I don't know why . . . I said all those things to him . . . and it set him wild. . . . Now hang me!"

She stood up like Jepthah's daughter—her face lifted, her little figure rigid like a bronze.

The big foreman, amazed, continued to regard her in a sort of wonder.

"We couldn't hang you, Miss Millie!" he repeated.

"Then you shall not hang him!"

She tore a fragment from the letter in her hand and pulled it into bits. Then she put the remainder of the letter on the table beside the note.

She sat down.

And leaning over the table the foreman read the letter. He read it aloud slowly like a child spelling out a lesson. "I settled with the old devil," were the words written on the fragment of the letter that remained.

He made no comment. And after a moment of indecision he went back to his chair by the window.

The remainder of the Grand Jury moved away from the table to their chairs. They sat down. The row of chairs made a sort of circle about the room . . . a sort of dreadful circle about the girl and the big, inert figure of the lawyer. No one spoke; and there was no sound.

There was something awful about the very immobility of this tribunal . . . about the very absence of any hostile feeling in it. It became for that lack terrible, like the tribunals imagined in some final judgment . . . beyond

pity, because beyond any feeling of ill will.

Any man on it would have given his right hand to see this girl and the man she loved go clear. But he could not give what was not his right to give—the honor of the commonwealth. The inquisition must go on; the law must be upheld; murder must be punished.

The big foreman spoke finally.

"Colonel," he said, "we have got to find the man who did this murder."

He spoke without looking toward the table. But he indicated the girl with a slight gesture of the head. It was clear what he meant. They must know. The information in the possession of this girl must not be withheld from them. The lawyer must go on.

But he did not go on. He moved his big body slowly in the chair, like one awakened. Then he replied:

"Yes . . . yes," he said, "that is it. We must find the man who did this murder."

And he turned sharply toward the sheriff standing at the door.

"Charlie," he said, "ask Mr. Barnes to come in."

The man who entered was at middle life. He had a solemn, obsequious manner. He was carefully dressed in black. He came in bareheaded and sat down beyond Colonel Braxton at the table. He did not speak, but he bowed gravely to the jury and its counsel. He was startled to see the girl there. But he gave no evidence of that surprise beyond a quick furtive glance that vanished immediately from the mask of his face.

He put down his hat beside him on the floor and passed a hand over his thin hair, where he was beginning to grow bald. Then he took a clean, folded handkerchief out of the breast pocket of his coat and wiped the perspiration from his face, for his black frock coat was buttoned to the chin, and it was hot.

Colonel Braxton addressed the witness.

"Mr. Barnes," he said, "our foreman here thinks we ought to find the guilty man, and I have asked the sheriff to call you in. . . . You know the guilty man?"

Barnes looked down a moment before he answered, like one who would assume a befitting reluctance in such an affair.

"Colonel," he said, "I cannot be expected to answer that."

He did not finish. The lawyer interrupted with a quick reply.

"No . . . no," he said, "of course, you cannot be expected to answer that . . . no . . . no. I withdraw that question."

He leaned over and took up the note and the fragment of the letter that the girl had put down before him. He turned them about a moment in his fingers. Then he addressed the witness, his voice in its leisurely drawl.

"Mr. Barnes," he said, "I am not going to trouble you to repeat here in detail your story of this tragic affair. I can understand how it is painful to you to go over it—particularly painful to you. There is no need. It is well known, and it does not vary."

He paused, and there came a strange smile on his face.

"But you will be relieved, sir, to know that by a fortunate coincidence we have here, from another source, conclusive evidence establishing two of the vital points in your report of this matter, not only corroborating your word, but I may venture to say, establishing those two vital points beyond doubt."

He went on, in voice and manner as though he were moved by a tender consideration for the witness, beyond other men:

"Richard Pickney told you on the night of the murder that he would settle with his uncle, and here is a fragment of a letter from him in which he says that he did settle with him. . . . You said that he was in a fury of rage against his uncle, and here is a witness who confirms that, and gives us the immediate reason for it.

"Now, Mr. Barnes, having been so conspicuously right in these two instances, you were equally right in a third. You thought Richard Pickney got his note of hand from the dead man. And he did get it, for here it is."

And putting out his hand, he moved the paper, on the table, with his finger. He leaned a little farther over toward the witness, and his voice descended into a friendly monotone.

"But there is one thing, Mr. Barnes, that puzzles me a little: Since it was so evidently the intention of Richard Pickney to kill his uncle, 'to settle with the old devil,' as he put it, why did he borrow the money from you in order to pay him and take up his note, before he killed him? He could kill him and then take the note. He did not need the money in order to get the note."

It was hot. The witness unbuttoned his coat. But at once, as though mindful of a proper funeral dress—out of respect to the dead, he buttoned it again to the collar.

"He didn't need the money to get the note, Colonel," he said; "but he needed it to get out of the country."

The lawyer made a slight gesture as if one pointed to an obvious thing that he had overlooked.

"Ah," he said, "that would be it. . . . Then it is your theory Mr. Barnes, that Richard Pickney kept the money, went in behind his uncle on this night, stabbed him to death, searched for his note among his papers, found it, and fled the country."

"Well, Colonel," replied the man, "I would not call it my theory. But I would say that is

what happened, from the evidence."

"Yes . . . yes . . ." continued Colonel Braxton. "Quite right. We must stick to the evidence. There was the dead man lying over the table and his pocketbook open and the papers from it scattered about him. Someone had searched that pocketbook and his papers. . . . And it was the assassin's work, for the pocketbook and the papers were bloodstained with fingerprints . . . Yes . . . Yes."

He paused a moment, as in reflection. Then he went on:

"And further, Mr. Barnes. It seems likely—it seems certain almost—that the assassin slipped in furtively behind his victim and killed him, and not at the end of a stormy interview, or else you would have heard high noises and the sounds of a struggle . . . and you did not hear anything . . . you did not hear a sound or a voice —only the horse going away on the road."

Again the witness unbuttoned his coat, and rebuttoned it. The heat was oppressive.

"That is right, Colonel," he said. "There were no sounds of a struggle."

The lawyer went on in his low-pitched, conversational voice.

"Precisely," he said. "You had no idea that anything unusual had occurred until you went into your uncle's library in the morning. . . . Was it dark in the room?"

"Not entirely dark, Colonel," replied the witness. "The blinds were down and the candles on the table had burned out. But there was light enough for me to see that something awful had happened."

"But not to see clearly?"

"No, not to see clearly. That's why I put up the blind—to find out what had happened."

"But you touched nothing."

"Nothing but the window blind. I put the window blind up."

"And that was the only thing in the room that you touched."

"The only thing."

Again the man fumbled with his coat, as though the heat of that black, buttoned garment oppressed him. Colonel Braxton observed his discomfort. But he did not remark on it. He went on, as in a leisurely explanation.

"It was a new patent window blind, on a roller with a spring. One puts it up by taking hold of it at the side, and pulling it down a little. That would release the spring and the blind would roll up to the top of the window. It did roll entirely up when you pulled it?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Barnes," the lawyer continued, "it was fortunate for us that you were so careful, so careful to touch nothing but this blind. You see, there had been only two persons in that room: Richard Pickney and yourself; that is to say, the one who did the

murder and the one who did not do it."

He leaned over as in confidence toward the witness, and spoke in a lower voice:

"I say it was fortunate Mr. Barnes, because it might have occurred to someone that, as a beneficiary under the decedent's will and as the assignee of your cousin's interest in the estate, you might wish your uncle out of the way . . . I mean—pardon me, Mr. Barnes—that a motive could be imagined. It might even be imagined that one so situated would construct evidences of guilt to incriminate the other."

The witness seemed perturbed by something behind the words and manner of the lawyer. He began to talk—wandering about the large essentials of the tragedy and his care, his extreme care, to see that the authorities found every detail precisely as he himself had found it. He had touched nothing—he bore upon the point—but the window blind to let in the light.

And while he talked, fingering the buttons of his coat, the girl sat, a tragic figure, her face white as plaster, her body motionless as though stricken by some sorcery into wood. The big foreman interrupted.

"Is there any use to go on with this, Colonel? . . . We want to know where the assassin is."

"You mean," replied Colonel Braxton, "who he is."

The foreman turned his big, placid face toward the lawyer, in a vague wonder.

"You know who he is, Colonel," he said.

There came a sudden energy into the lawyer.

"Yes," he said, "I know who he is. He is the man who had the blood on his hands, that night in the room of murder."

He turned abruptly on the witness.

"Was there blood on your hands?"

The man seemed to retreat into his chair—his hands extended before him.

"No," he said. "No . . . my hands were clean. . . . There was no blood on them."

The lawyer seemed to tower over the witness . . . to pursue him.

"Blood . . . blood . . . on your hands?"

And, protesting, the witness seemed to retreat, like a man pressed to a wall with a knife against him.

"No . . . No . . ."

And his hands clutched his coat.

The flood of energy in the big body of the lawyer appeared to vitalize the room.

"Barnes," he cried, "let us make an end of this. You killed your uncle, and robbed his body, searching through his papers for the money that Richard Pickney had paid him for his note."

With a gesture, he caught up the long package from the table, tore off its paper cover, and held up the blind of the window: the blind that Barnes had touched. . . . And plainly on the white fabric was the imprint of bloody fingers, concealed from view when the blind had gone up.

He went on, his voice lashing the assassin like a flail:

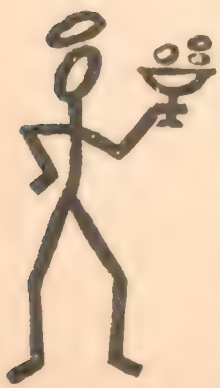
"There is no blood on this note, this note that Richard Pickney has returned here, for he paid the money to his uncle and received it before he rode away. But there is blood on this blind. . . . And I predict, I predict, sir, that there is blood on the stolen money. . . . What is it that you guard so carefully in your buttoned coat? . . . What is it Barnes?"

The great voice lashed the man, and he sprang up, clutching his buttoned coat.

He remained a moment, desperate, his face wild. The sheriff barred the way out by the door. But the window before the man was open, and with a cry he sprang into it, hung there a second, and plunged out.

It was thirty feet to the stone-paved court below. . . . He lay dispossessed of life, his arms in his black coat extended, sprawling like a crow brought down by a hunter. . . . And when they looked, sewed up in the lining of his coat, they found the stolen money, fingerprinted, like the scattered papers of Dunmore Pickney, with Dunmore Pickney's blood.

IMPROVING WINE



Readers of Margery Allingham's CASE OF THE WIDOW (June 1958) may have found a recent news report from Germany interesting. In Weisbaden, Valentin Korn was sentenced to two and one-half years at hard labor, fined $23,600 (an immense sum in Marks) and barred from his trade for five years. Korn, a wine maker, had found a way of "improving" Rhine wines, his technique including pumping carbonic acid into a stale compound and bottling it as "champagne." The prosecutor is quoted as declaring at his trial: "The faith of the world in German wine has been shaken to the depths."

not my funeral

by ... Vela DePeugh

He couldn't afford to wait much longer. The suspense was beginning to wear him down. She must die soon!

EDNA gave the silly high giggle that prefaced her pet expression, and back of Dave's pleasant, undistinguished features the ugly thought swirled and jelled into firm determination.

"Let her go ahead and get herself a red hat, it's not my funeral."

Her husband shifted the bag of groceries in his arm and lengthened his step. God knew he wasn't a killer! His weapons had always been a quick wit and a persuasive voice; his prey middle-aged, middle-class women with more money than brains. And, willing to take a reasonable, quick profit, it was seldom that he'd even had to bother with a farce of marriage.

When he met Edna at Walnut Lake in July she'd looked good for a few easy grand—twice a widow and man-hungry, with a nice lot of property in fast-growing Center City. But when she'd turned coy and insisted on marriage nobody could say he hadn't put on a good act as the devoted bridegroom. Even though he thought sometimes the way it turned his stomach was hardly

Californian Vela DePeugh, who admits to membership in the gentler sex, and has been previously published in women's magazines, makes a first appearance in these pages. Miss DePeugh writes that she has nothing against love—so long as it has a bit of violence to liven it up and *at least some mystery.*

worth the money he expected. But he'd had all he could take.

And Edna was still evasively stubborn about making any new investments.

"Sweetie-pie, let's not talk about tiresome ol' business," she'd cooed the night before. Perching on the arm of his chair and running her plump fingers through his graying but still thick brown hair. He'd wanted to slam her half-way across the room, but he'd had to sit there and take it. Even make himself slide an arm about her thick waist.

"But this is a chance to double our money—"

"Phooey! That's what they all say. And it's not going to be my funeral. 'Sides, we couldn't be happier ten times as rich." Her voice was smugly saccharine. "And Sam always said to hang onto real estate. It *may* make you rich, and meantime no one can pocket it and walk away."

He'd jerked back from her, startled. "You mean you don't trust me? Edna, that hurts."

"Silly!" She'd reached to drag him against her flabby breast, and he'd had a moment of hope. A remorseful woman could be dangerous. " 'Course I trust 'ou. Just don't want ol' business taking Davey away from 'ittle me. Like it did poor Sam and Ernie."

Dave had endured again the all-too-familiar story of Sam's ulcers and Ernie's pneumonia, and the devotion with which Edna had nursed both in their time. "But they wouldn't mind the doctor and take things easy." She sighed. "Just worked themselves to death. And Edna don't mean to lose 'ou, lambie-love."

Apparently she didn't mean to lose any money, either. The silly damn fool would never part with a cent so long as she lived. And he sure as hell wasn't going to walk out empty-handed. Not after going through what he had —even baby-talk, for God's sake! And that was the least of it. A dozen long-legged, high-busted blondes wouldn't be enough to wipe this caper out of his memory.

As usual, Edna was hanging onto his arm when they came to the busy intersection. He pushed through the small crowd to the curb edge, glanced down to see her sandaled feet teetering beside his, and for the first time did not feel contempt for the vanity behind her silly shoes.

Then he saw the big bus, barreling along to make the light, and knew his luck was in. Timing it exactly right, he changed the bag of groceries to his other arm, shaking off Edna's clinging hand as he did so. Then a half step back, a twisting shove of body, and the woman was lurching off the curb right under those charging wheels.

What the hell—? He was being yanked after Edna!

His frantic effort to draw back only swung his body around, arms flailing wildly. For a timeless moment he hung poised on the curb edge, with the air full of flying groceries, harsh screams, and the rattlesnake hiss of death behind him.

His clawing hands tangled in cloth that brought a weight crushing onto his chest, even as his back smashed against the side of the slowing bus with a ripple of searing pain.

"Lover! How's Edna's hero-man today?"

He wanted to gag. He wanted to swear. He wanted to crawl out of this pit of coals they called a hospital bed and with vicious intensity new to him, smash everything in sight. Instead, he pulled a weak smile over his thin face for the benefit of his gushing wife and admiring neighbors.

"That was damn brave, boy!" Jim started to slap at a shoulder and remembered in time the lacerated back.

"Why you jumped right in front of Edna!" Bessie marveled. "It's a wonder you weren't killed."

"When I saw her going—" He broke off with a grimace of pain. He meant to make his hospital stay last as long as possible. "You two take care of my girl," his weak voice begged the Martins with feeling. And he wasn't worried that the stupid jerks would guess what kind of feeling, either.

Edna, the damn human vine, had stuck her hand in his coat pocket when he'd shook it from his arm. That's what had jerked him off the curb after her. He still got the shakes when he thought how close it had been. If he hadn't kept his balance.

Well, let them play him up as the big hero, the devoted husband.

It would make it all the safer. That "accident" might not have been so smart, though no one, not even Edna, seemed to realize she'd been pushed. But now when he killed her, who would question it? Especially with the big insurance policy he was taking out in her favor. Jim was handling it for him, and knew he'd refused to let Edna insure herself—made a big point of just wanting to protect her.

That would show up well at the inquest. But he couldn't afford to wait too long, for the premium would just about clean him.

He waited until the Saturday a week after his return home. He'd been careful to move stiffly and favor apparently still-sore muscles. It had kept Edna at a little distance. Well, part of the time, anyway.

"How about a picnic at The Falls tomorrow?" he suggested casually after breakfast. "With

Jim and Bessie. This Indian Summer won't last."

She gave him a bright-eyed look. Then nodded. "I'll run over right away. You want cold chicken? You know Bessie can't seem to fry it the way you like."

"You've spoiled me." He patted her plump white arm. "I'll take the car down and have the brakes checked."

But it was the Martins' car they took the next morning, Dave reluctantly admitting that he'd better not drive.

"Got spots in front of my eyes. Guess smelling the chicken cooking last night stirred up my liver. Fresh air ought to fix me up," he assured them.

Yet when they reached the high point above the rocky canyon and spread the lunch in a sheltered spot, Dave ate little and admitted to a slight headache. Later he decided to lie down on a blanket for a nap instead of walking around the point with the others. But he looked at Edna so wistfully that she turned back to stay there with him.

For some time he lay with his head in her ample lap, pretending to doze, but tensely counting off the moments. It was too late in the season for many picnickers, and anyway this little cove was sheltered from almost every direction. But how long would the Martins be gone?

He sat up slowly. "Guess you rubbed the ache away, honey. Want to go meet Jim and Bessie?"

Where the trail narrowed, just over the Falls, would be the place. Later, he'd let the Martins wake him from apparent sleep. When they found Edna's body in the rocky pool below, they'd think she'd got bored and gone to join them—and stumbled or slipped to her death.

Dave moved easily a half step ahead of Edna, calling her attention to the crimson and gold of the turning foliage in the canyon. At the spot he'd chosen he looked down a moment, and then went on; only to turn sharply back and bend over, pretending to peer intently below.

"Say! Looks like someone's been prying at Black Rock, trying to make it fall. Think it will?"

Close behind him he heard the inane giggle. "Well, let it. It's not my funeral."

He felt a rush of ugly triumph. Oh, yes, it is, you cow! he thought, reaching a hand back for hers. Not in support, but to give a violent yank that would send her body flying out and down to death in the rocky pool.

He was still feeling for that plump, moist hand when Edna's foot shot up against his bent hips, catapulting him out into space.

Edna looked up dully at the hand on her arm. The chaplain was saying something. . . . It was time.

Queer, she didn't feel much of anything. Maybe because she'd been living this moment in her mind for so many years. Ever since she'd escaped from a whining invalid mother by the simple method of withholding heart stimulant during an attack. No one had suspected her then.

No one had suspected, either, that Sam's "ulcer" was arsenic—Not until they'd dug him up after her arrest. They couldn't prove anything about Ernie, though. A drugged sleep in a wind-whipped, ice-cold room had left no trace.

She'd really loved Dave. But right away she'd begun to suspect that his interest was more in her property than her person. And after he'd tried to push her under the bus, there wasn't anything else she *could* do, was there? He'd made it easy for her, making all the arrangements himself like that.

And then Jim had to ruin everything.

Just because it was his company that had insured Dave. Why they'd been neighbors for years—even best friends. Who'd think he'd go and put detectives on her?

It just went to show you couldn't trust anybody!

THE DEATH OF RASPUTIN

Rasputin, the mystic who dominated St. Petersburg Society and the Imperial Court, had admitted to intimates that he was in contact with German agents and that he was drugging the Tsar. Convinced that Russia could only be saved by the removal of the man, Prince Youssoupoff, who was married to a niece of the Tsar, and some friends, planned accordingly.

Rasputin was invited to the Moika Palace to drink with the Prince and his friends. While the others played "Yankee Doodle" on a gramophone upstairs, the Prince offered Rasputin cakes and wine—cakes filled with powdered cyanide and wine from glasses smeared with the same poison. Rasputin ate the cakes and drank the wine—and complained that his throat bothered him and that he felt sleepy. His good friend must sing to him on his guitar. Then they would visit the gypsies.

At this point the Prince shot him with a revolver, through the heart. All of them agreed that he was dead, but when the Prince returned to the basement room the old man came to life and, foaming at the mouth, tried to strangle him. Youssoupoff escaped and Rasputin, bellowing, found his way into a courtyard. Four more shots were fired at him there, but when the body was carried indoors it was found Rasputin was still alive, on which he was battered to death. The Prince then collapsed in a dead faint, and Rasputin's body was thrown into the Neva.

It is of course history that the "removal" was in vain.

THE saint's RATINGS

Leave no stone unturned,

but it looks like our reviewer has turned over one stone too many this month —and wishes that he hadn't. Seems he will go for a lot in a crime book. After all, aren't blondes, bullets, gore and strychnine cocktails all a part of the stock in trade. But this same reviewer moans at the new trend in nausea and negativity, as exemplified by a book below. Far below. In fact he asks us to introduce a new category, a frightening step in a hallowed institution like this. Two pitchforks. Which means break in half and throw in two *ash-cans—a suitable fate for a book whose hero is a loathsome ex-shamus and skid-row dweller who staggers drunkenly from sick violence to sweating sex. When reading this sort of thing one* does *feel nostalgic for those times when the butler "done" it.*

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- Three haloes: Outstanding
- Two haloes: Above average
- One halo: Passable reading
- A pitchfork: For the ashcan

TAKE A MURDER, DARLING, by Richard S. Prather (Gold Medal, 25¢)

The most readable Shell Scott caper to date. Not only have Prather's gags improved to the point where they raise a chuckle, but he has mastered the technique of *never* slowing for a breath. Recommended to Shell Scott fans: to be taken by others only with a large grain of salt.

BLACKMAIL, INC., by Robert Kyle (Dell, 25¢)

The story behind the men behind the exposé magazines. Apparently author Kyle has spent some time in their dirt-littered editorial offices, but he doesn't let this exotic background interfere with his murders. For the first half of the book at least. The tremendous promise of the beginning gets bogged down in complications—but it's still a good yarn.

MURDER OF A WIFE, by Henry Kuttner (Permabooks, 35¢)

Perhaps Kuttner's last book, this was published just before his death. A workmanlike story of brutal murder and the horrors of the subconscious. With a detective-psychoanalyst who carefully wends his way through this tacky maze. Never exceptional, but always satisfying.

WEB OF MURDER, by Harry Whittington (Gold Medal, 25¢)

A smart lawyer, rolling in money, murders his wife for the most senseless reasons in the most complex and stupid fashion ever conceived. He deserves his Awful Fate—and so do you if you read this.

I LIKE 'EM TOUGH, by Curt Cannon (Gold Medal, 25¢)

I don't.

mimic murder

by . . . Cornell Woolrich

It was too bad for the two men that they had not been warned about His Highness' very unusual burglar alarm.

JIMMIE, the nightman, came through the lounge stopping here and there to poke the wall. Each time he did so a reading lamp or a pair of wall brackets went out. The big railroad station of a room went slowly down the chromatic scale, from bright yellow to dull smoky orange, just an ace above visibility. It would have broken Depew, the hotel manager's heart, Keller knew, to leave one single light more than was necessary burning five minutes after twelve o'clock.

The big clock in the corner started to chime midnight, but Jimmie was better than any clock come this time of night. He didn't put out any of the lights directly over any guest, but the implication was plain: Get out of here and go up to your rooms, night owls. A young couple chatting in subdued tones over in the corner, a desultory newspaper reader or two, took the hint, got up, strolled outside to the main lobby.

Jimmie came by the easy chair where Keller was stretched out, bobbed his white wool pate. "Howdy, Mist' Keller. Guess you won't want this one no more."

Cornell Woolrich was of course writing at a time when Maharajahs, and their ladies, were less familiar to New York. Sometimes women in saris would be mistaken for gypsies (even by gypsies, as a matter of fact) while it was taken for granted that all Hindus had special and very spiritual powers.

Originally published in *Black Mask*, June, 1937.
Reprinted by arrangement with the author.

Click! And a blue shadow took the place of the halo that had surrounded Keller. Keller wasn't a guest.

"I know I gotta go to work," Keller grunted, "but don't rub it in, will ya?" He went on duty at twelve, but the clock wasn't through chiming yet and he wasn't that nutty about the job he was going to try to beat the clock to the front desk.

"You sho' loves it lak I do."

"Ah sho' does," mimicked Keller. Which was a trifle exaggerated; he didn't exactly hate it, but he didn't like this midnight-to-morning stretch. The whole job was his idea of being in a rut; nothing ever happened.

"Dang!" the clock went for the twelfth time. Keller clapped his hands down to the arms of the chair with a whack, forced himself upright on them as though they were levers, strolled out to the front.

Peters, the daytime and evening dick, was leaning there on one elbow chatting with Frost the night clerk. "That's right, don't hurry, walk nice and slow," he said satirically, "you're on my time now."

"Maybe I should dash around the corner on roller skates, so you can go up and read the rest of the night."

"That, over there," said Peters, with an unnoticeable hitch of the head, "is on your time. It's one past twelve."

Keller glanced at the young couple who had been in the lounge just now. They were standing self-consciously by the elevator waiting for the car to come down. He looked inquiringly at the night clerk. "Burroughs," Frost informed him cryptically.

Keller sauntered over, said politely, "Excuse me, Mr. Burroughs, could I see you for a minute?" He took him aside, said tactfully, "Against the house regulations. Thought you'd rather have me tell you now, than have the desk ring your room later."

The Burroughs kid reddened. Keller offered him a cigarette to tide him over his embarrassment. He could be a nice guy, Keller. The girl seemed to understand, took the young fellow's arm without a word. They turned and went out.

Frost remarked, "And while you're getting yourself disliked, you may as well run up and give 812 the password."

This was a horse of a different color, Keller had no compunctions in this case. He rode up to the eighth floor, gave the 812 door a rousing rattety-tat, and without waiting for it to be opened, which he didn't expect it to be in any case, called out with shattering clarity: "Get her outta there, now!"

A jeering voice answered with equal audibility, "You're too early, you little mind-reader, she

didn't get here yet! Come around in an hour!"

This time it was Keller's turn to redden. He arched his insteps and picked his way carefully back the way he'd come.

The door of 806 opened before he could make the lift, and a peculiar looking head thrust out at him and nearly scared him out of a year's growth. It was feminine only in theory, shaped like a hatchet, and with a lot of little paper curlers all over it like spaghetti.

"Oh, Mr. Keller," it said plaintively, "I'm so glad I heard you out here. I'm sure there's a man under my bed."

"Lady," Keller felt like saying, "he'll have to take his own chances, he needn't expect me to help him out," but didn't. He went in to the accompaniment of a twittering sound from the room's owner, squatted down contemplatively in the center of the floor, and finally hauled out a pair of wooden shoe-trees that had been lying there upside down. Only an expert could have told whether the expression on the lady's adze-profile was relief or disappointment.

"Sorry I can't do any better for you," Keller murmured, and backed defensively out.

"Oh, Mr. Keller, I think you're so brave!" said the lady yearningly.

"So do I," said her rescuer, and all but tripped over the doorstep and sat down as he retreated nervously before her.

Outside, he cravenly mopped his brow, but not because he'd been afraid of finding a man under the bed.

Hotels are funny places.

"Wise guy!" he snarled at Frost when he got down to the desk again. "Why didn't you make sure first about 812?"

The clerk shrugged. "Hell, it's Wednesday, isn't it?"

Keller was about to answer heatedly, when a siren sang out throatily outside at the curb. "We've got company," he remarked. The revolving door swirled and Davis, the night doorman, came in in a hurry. And anything that could thaw him, Keller knew, must have been something.

"Say, there's some kind of a foreign guy with a headache out there wants to know can he have a whole suite for himself."

"Can he!" said Frost. "That's all we got nothing else but, left over this time of year. Why didn't you send him in, what's the idea making station announcements?"

"I wasn't sure you'd take him in," protested Davis, who hailed from Tennessee. "He's light enough, but you know how strict Mr. Depew—"

"I'm desk clerk here, I'll do the deciding," Frost squelched him.

The lord high admiral of the portals retreated as hurriedly as he

had shown up, gold braid flying out behind him. Frost, who hadn't been doing a thing until now but chinning with Keller, got very busy all of a sudden poring over a ledger, which is part of the technique of hotel clerks when they want to make an impression. Keller stayed where he was, eyes on the door, which was beginning to spin again.

It was worth watching. "Get a load," he breathed. Frost forgot his too-busy pose and joined him in goggling.

First came a very stout short man, Davis's "guy with a headache." He was butterscotch complected, and with the kind of curling brilliantined mustaches Italian immigrants used to go in for forty years ago. He was muffled up to the ears in a polo coat, as though unused to the northern climate. He wore a bulging rose-colored turban wrapped around his head, and a single pearl of incalculable value at the lobe of each ear. Behind him tripped an eyeful of American womanhood, blue-eyed, blonde as sunlight, wrapped in furs, platinum wedding-band on her finger, and a peculiar-looking monkey with bangs over his eyes nestled in the curve of her arm. Its tail nearly touched the floor and kept twitching like a snake.

Third came another guy, also —as Davis would have put it— with a headache, but no pearls at his ears. He was several degrees darker, coffee-colored and clean-shaven, evidently a retainer. He carried three filigreed boxes that looked like jewel cases, and he carried them openly, with a fine disregard for American crime waves. Fourth came a breezy young American, with a fine coat of tan and a slapdash hat, coat, and manner, who looked as if he wasn't more than two years out of some college.

Keller's first impression of him was one of liking. His second, which didn't necessarily alter the first at all, was: "That sheik's a sucker, shuffling them two in the same deck; he's asking for a misdeal!" The blonde and the American went too well together, like gin and vermouth; if they hadn't found it out yet, they would eventually. Being a hotel detective makes you naturally cynical.

Last of all came Jimmie the nightman—six round-trips of him —until the lobby was piled with a mound of luggage six feet high and ten at its base. The party had ranged itself before the desk, behind the "sheik."

"Good evening," the latter said, in a clipped Oxford accent that put both Keller and the clerk to shame, "I am the maharajah of Pedang. You can accommodate me? We overlooked to wire ahead for reservations."

Frost was all but chinning himself on the onyx desk slab. "We have a tower apartment I think

your highness would like, open on all four sides and with its own private terraces." Manager Depew, Keller happened to know, hadn't been able to sell it with any consistency since September, 1929.

The potentate's eyes brightened childishly. "Will I be able to see the electric signs, the ones that jump and make pictures, from it? I like them very much! In my country we have nothing—"

The blonde vision and the young American, Keller noticed, exchanged a tolerant smile in the background, like fond parents of a spoiled child. "So it's begun already, has it?" he thought to himself. There was a possibility, of course, that he had the relationship mixed, but the maharajah himself straightened him out on that a minute later, when Frost dipped a pen and held it toward him.

"Do I sign for everybody or just my own name?" smiled the maharajah apologetically. "It has been so many years since I have traveled in the West." And then without further ado he began to introduce them, as though it were a social gathering. "This is her highness the maharanee, my first wife."

The blonde dropped her eyes disdainfully, evidently knowing better than to greet a mere hotel clerk, even if her lord didn't know any better than to introduce her. She fondled the monkey's bearded chin, and it went: "Cheep, cheep, cheep," a little bit like a canary.

"This is my faithful retainer Misra Dao, and this is my American bodyguard, Mr. Bud Allen."

"Bodyguard against what, mosquitoes?" thought Keller, sizing up the young fellow. "If I sneezed he'd fall over!"

The chap looked momentarily displeased, as though he didn't enjoy being card-indexed, would have preferred being taken for just a member of the family.

Frost was holding the pen, and the maharajah took it, remarking, "I like to write my name in English, it takes up so much room." The ink, however, had evidently congealed a little meanwhile. He gave it a flip downward toward the floor, to cause it to flow more freely. Instantly the native retainer followed suit, flipping the smallest of the three jewel cases he was burdened with down at the marble floor, as though something had made him sulky or peevish just then. A minute afterwards he looked frightened, sorry for what he'd done; his eyes sought his master's pleadingly. And well he might.

The box had opened with the impact and an array of glittering red and green and brilliant stones set in fantastically gorgeous rings, pendants, bracelets and pins had rolled out all over the lobby. The maharanee looked distressed. "Oh, now we're going to have a scene," Keller thought he heard

her murmur in the bodyguard's direction.

They did. The potentate burst into a torrent of exasperated Oriental vituperation, advanced upon his retainer, slapped him viciously half a dozen times in the face, with windmill gestures. The slaps sounded like firecrackers in the quiet lobby. The man just stood there without trying to avert his face or cringing, as though he were used to this kind of treatment. The maharajah's wife mourned aloud, to no one in particular, under cover of her husband's vocal broadsides: "He'll stay up the rest of the night now, beating him, I suppose!"

Keller did most of the picking up, with Allen helping out here and there. Detective to the core, he kept his eyes on the other man's hands more than he did on the errant jewels. He handed the refilled box back to the maharajah, who was switching back to English as he cooled off. "Camel! Blister upon my happiness! Fever-sore upon my peace of mind! It might have been one of the other boxes!"

What, Keller wondered, did he mean by that? What could be more valuable than these rubies and emeralds and diamonds? The maharajah didn't even deign to count or glance at them; slammed the lid and restored the box to his chastised servant, as though it were beneath his dignity to do any carrying himself.

Frost cleared his throat, suggested, "Pardon my intruding, but wouldn't your highness prefer to have us take care of your valuables in the hotel safe?"

The maharanee unexpectedly seconded the motion. "Oh, yes, put them in," she pleaded. "It makes me nervous to have them up around where we're sleeping!"

The maharajah pondered, agreed. Manager Depew was hurriedly sent for, the safe in the inner room behind the desk was opened by him, Frost not having the combination, and the trembling Misra began to pass over the boxes. The changing hands of them, however, created another disturbance in the cozy checking-in party. The pet monkey, as the boxes were passed close to him, became very agitated, went into spasms, and finally shot upward into the air in a flying tackle that settled him in the middle of the big crystal lobby chandelier. It began tinkling and playing tunes like a music-box, with the animal's long curling tail hanging out of the middle of it—but too high to grab.

Keller sent Jimmie for a step-ladder, but they didn't wait. "A banana will bring him down," suggested the maharajah amiably. "Send him up to us later. He is a good boy," and having signed, he entered the elevator.

"They should wring his neck, for my part," Keller overheard the wife comment to the body-

guard as they followed him in. "And forty million American girls envy me, yet!"

Frost and Depew both went up with them, as befitted the occasion; Keller stayed below. He wouldn't have been a hotel dick if he hadn't reversed the register as soon as they were gone and taken a gander at it. It began with "Hari" (which he innocently took to be a misspelling), went on for nearly three-quarters of a page, and finally wound up with "Pedang, Straits Settlements." So he was a Malay, and not from India. And, he supposed, blonde hair was at a premium down there, which explained a lot of things.

Whistlings, cluckings, cooings, and swear words had absolutely no effect on the fugitive simian, until Keller bethought himself of a slot machine at the entrance to the bar. He came back with a nickel's worth of Indian nuts, spread them around on the floor, and that did the trick. The little beast came down by way of the moulding and made no effort to elude Keller when he reached for it.

"What got into you all of a sudden?" the big dick asked, making friends with it. Its long tail curled sociably around his neck, and the monkey was perched on his shoulder, munching away, by the time Depew and Frost came down again—which was not for another half-hour.

The manager was mopping his bald dome and they both looked all in. "If you ever get another maharajah," he told the night clerk, "hang out an S.R.O. sign! I've gotten ten years older since they showed up!" and he returned to his room.

"What happened now?" Keller asked Frost.

"Him and his servant both went into hysterics up there, all on account of the furniture in one of the rooms was covered with pigskin. It seems their religion won't let 'em touch it. We had to drag it out with our bare hands at this hour of the morning, and now they're burning incense all over to disinfect the place! That peacherino that's hitched to him has my sympathy."

"I don't know," drawled Keller the worldly-wise, fondling the monkey's chin whiskers, "I always feel sorry for a guy that gets short-changed. I guess I'll take Fido here back where he belongs. Keep a gun handy," he advised the clerk, "now that you've got all that ice in the frigidaire. I'll be right down again."

The little weazened passenger on his shoulder amused himself, going up in the car, with totally unnecessary delousing explorations on Keller's scalp. They were fast friends already; the detective, who had never suspected he had this sentimental streak in him, found himself strangely attached to the weird little shaver.

The elevator only took them as

far as the top floor of the main building; there was an automatic lift from there up, servicing the tower.

"Find anything yet?" Keller grinned at his furry friend while he was waiting outside the suite to be let in. The latter went "Jabber-jabber-jabber," and leaned his own little head tenderly against the detective's, like two souses about to commit close harmony.

The maharanee opened the door and didn't look particularly pleased at the interruption. She was in white silk lounging pajamas now, smoking a cigarette through a foot-long jade holder. "Why didn't you give it chloroform?" she scowled ungraciously.

Allen was standing watchfully in the background, waiting to see who it was—trying to act like a bodyguard, as Keller put it to himself. He didn't have any welcome-mat out on his face, either. The maharajah and Misra were outside on the terrace making a lot of racket—presumably looking at the lights of the city.

"All right, come on, you!" the maharanee snapped, and held her arm stiffly out in a Fascist salute for the unwelcome pet to use as a gang plank. The simian, however, had developed a sudden passionate devotion to Keller, adopted him as it were. He clung with both arms—and tail—and had to be pried loose like a barnacle. Keller just stood there passively and let them do it. He hated to see him go.

"Take him in the other room, Bud!" the woman ordered furiously. So it was Bud already, was it? She suddenly thrust a dollar-bill into Keller's hand. "Thank you, my man."

"I'm not your man and I'm not a bellboy," he told her curtly, and let the bill fall on the floor. The last thing he heard as he turned away and she banged the door vindictively behind him, was the maharajah calling to her joyously from the terrace: "Betty! Betty! Come quick and see! I've found one that shows Eskimos riding on a sleigh pulled by reindeer!"

Keller wore his scowl all the way down. Damned little manicurist or waitress—she might be able to bluff them in Singapore, but her kind came a dime a dozen around here!

Frost was just hanging up the desk phone when he got down again. "I hope they settle down for the night soon! They're making such a racket out on that terrace that all the people on the upper floors are beginning to complain. Oh, by the way," he went on, "couple of tough-looking babies checked in just now after you went on. Too bad you weren't here to spot 'em. I gave 'em a blank page to register on, and they deliberately turned back and took a gander at his highness's

life-history on the one before. Then I see them give each other the office, like that was what they wanted to know. Made me kind of jittery, with all that ice back there in the can. I parked 'em good and low, on the second, where you can get at 'em easy if they start anything. I'm glad the maharajah's ice is in the vault."

Jimmie came down and straight over to the desk. "Those two punks didn't have a thing in their bags, plumb empty, you can't fool me. They's up to something!"

Keller just smoothed the skirt of his coat over his rod and didn't say anything. The desk phone rang again. Frost hung up wearily. "Old maid in the south tower's sure she just saw two men on the terrace opposite her, with pumpkins for heads, jumping up and down. She's having kittens up there now!"

"Can't exactly blame her at that," commented Keller judiciously, "waking up all of a sudden and—"

It rang again. "Why was I ever born?" Frost sighed, and put it to his ear. His face did a quick strip-tease down to the bone. "Oh, my God, that's awful!" he panted. "Hang onto him. We'll be right with you."

Keller moved in on him, flipping his chin up inquiringly.

"That servant of theirs just pushed the maharajah off the edge of the terrace—the west one, seventeen stories above the street!"

Keller had reversed, was in the elevator already with Jimmie. He waved the clerk back behind the desk. "No, the ice—stick down here with it! Get Depew. Send a front out to cover the body and stand by till the cops come. Which one of them phoned?"

"The American feller." The phone was ringing away again like blazes, unanswered, as the elevator shot upward; presumably other guests, whose slumbers had been disturbed earlier, had witnessed the tragedy and were trying to report it.

The automatic was down where he had left it the last time. Allen was silhouetted against the open tower-suite doorway, waiting to speed him into the death chambers.

"All the way down to the street, over and over and over like a top!" he said breathlessly. But even landing on one of the setbacks would have been enough to break every bone in his body, Keller knew. He flashed in past him.

The maharanee was screaming away face-down on a divan, beating her heels up and down like in the Australian crawl, having third-degree hysterics. The culprit was still outside on the terrace where it had happened, squatted there forlornly on the flagstones, beating his own breast vigorously with both hands and wailing like a moonstruck dog.

"Did he do it purposely?" Kel-

ler wanted to know as he chased through the room.

The maharanee paused long enough in her hysterics to throw up her head, gasp, "Deliberately! Bud and I both saw him do it!" Then she went back into her spasm again.

"Must've gone amuck," Allen added, coming out after Keller. "These people often do."

"Doesn't look like it now," Keller observed, with a glance at the repentent Misra, who was now banging his turbanned head against the stone flooring. "Hang onto him, don't let him do it to me while I'm not looking," he warned, and leaned perilously over the parapet to look down at the scene below.

There was a rapidly accumulating bunch of black ants down there on the arc-lit street, in a wide circle around a single motionless ant—and more coming up every minute. Halfway down, a pinkish streamer fluttered lazily at full length from an ornamental railing on one of the narrow setbacks—the maharajah's turban-cloth. On the opposite tower were zig-zags of yellow squares, with black heads bobbing up and down in them.

"What a gallery this thing had!" Keller grunted, and as he turned around again, barked: "Don't do that!"

Allen was pounding viciously at the writhing Misra with his right fist, holding him by the back of the neck.

The detective split them apart none too gently, giving Allen the harder shove. "Where do you come in?" he wanted to know menacingly.

"He killed my employer, the dirty, snivelling—!"

"I don't care who he killed, you haven't authority to put a finger to him!"

The maharanee, visible through the lighted French window openings, had recovered sufficiently to sit up and snifflingly pour herself a shot of Scotch, which she downed neat. She was down flat again on her tummy, however, when Keller stepped back inside, arm hooked around the limp Misra.

"Want a chaser?" he asked dryly.

The poor little Malay was groggy from the blows Allen had given him, bleeding a little at the lip. Keller took his hand off him and he folded up cross-legged on the floor like an accordion.

"Close those windows," Keller ordered Allen, "I got a sneaking hunch he'd like to follow his master over. Does he talk any English?"

The two of them answered at once, with almost unnecessary spitefulness, Keller thought. "Yes!" And the widowed maharanee added: "The dirty dog! Ask him yourself whether or not he did it, hear what he says! I saw

it with my own eyes! I couldn't get over to them in time!"

"There were people watching from the other tower. *They* must have seen it, ask them to tell you!" Allen put in sulkily.

"You protest too much," Keller thought to himself. He put his face down close to the hunched-up Malay's: "Did he slip or did you push him?"

The man raised streaming, mournful eyes. "I throw. I throw —down." Then he lifted both hands to his turban, began tearing at it, went through motions of sprinkling imaginary dust—or was it ashes—upon his own bent head?

"Why?" persisted Keller, stabbing him with his finger. "What for?"

"Allah has afflicted me," moaned the man.

"Oh, Hari was always beating and abusing him," the maharanee put in petulantly. "You saw what happened in the lobby tonight yourself. He's probably been building up a grudge for years. I knew something like this would happen sooner or later! I asked him not to bring him with us." She sniffled genteelly, touched a handkerchief to the corner of each eye. But the crest of the flood, it could be seen, was over.

"You — er — seem sufficiently composed now, your highness," Keller remarked ironically. "You say you saw it happen. Suppose you tell me about it."

She accepted a lighted cigarette from Allen, fixed it in the holder. "We were all four of us out there, looking at the lights. Hari, in his excitement, insisted on standing up on the tiled parapet with both feet to get a better view. This beast—" she put her hands to her waist, "was standing behind him holding him up, with a hand over each hip, like this. He did it two or three times, and then jumped down again. I begged him to stop it, to be careful. You heard me, didn't you, Bud?"

Bud had.

"They moved around the corner to the western side, directly over the street and not the extension-roof, but they were still in full sight of us. He got up again like before. I called out 'Hari, come down from there!' and they both turned their heads to look our way. And then right under my very eyes, this demon gave a vicious shove out—like that—with both arms at once. Oh, it was unmistakable, you could see the thrust forward like a man shooting for a basket in basketball. And of course Hari went way out and over, past all the setbacks even."

"Then what did he do?"

"He just stood there looking over after him, and jabbering away like a monkey. Bud hit him when we got to him, I think, and knocked him senseless, so that he wouldn't turn on us next, and then went in to phone. I just col-

lapsed. Oh, it was a hideous experience!"

Keller went to stop the pounding at the door, and two city dicks and a cop streamed in. "This where that guy jumped from?"

"He didn't jump, he was pushed," Keller mentioned quietly. He could see the correction forming indignantly on both their lips, Allen's and hers, so he saved them the trouble. "I'm the hotel dick," he said. "It seems to be pretty cut and dried, from what I can find out about it. They can tell you all you want to know better than I can." He moved toward the door, turned around to look from there.

The presence of newcomers seemed to have whipped up the maharanee's grief anew; she was sobbing away again, gracefully prone. "She ought to get paid for it," Keller said to himself knowingly. A tear for every jewel she was coming into, in those cases down in the safe. A rosary of greed.

The sight of the harness-cop's uniform seemed to terrify Misra more than that of the other two; he groveled away from him along the floor, whimpering, "Lattah—me go! Oh, *sahib,* lattah—me go!"

Keller couldn't help noticing how the maharanee's sobbing broke off short just then, for a minute, then resumed. Her face was hidden, but when he looked at Allen's, it had paled under its tan, was just then slowly resuming its normal hue.

Something had jolted the two of them, both at the same time. Was it what Misra had done, groveling away just then, or what he had said? But he hadn't said anything, just "Let me go." They might know that the police wouldn't release him, why should they get frightened at his mere mention of it?

There was a sudden chirping of delight, and a furry little missile threw itself through an open transom at Keller's shoulder, wrapped two skinny little arms affectionately around his head. "Hel-lo," Keller greeted, scratching it under the chin, "what's this certain something that I've got?"

"Take him with you, he's a nuisance," said the maharanee irritably.

Keller went out without saying anything, rode only to the base of the tower, then took the other automatic up that fed its twin. In the room facing the opposite tower he found a couple who had seen the whole thing. The maharajah's jubilation about the skyline had aroused them before the murder had taken place, carrying all too clearly across the quiet night air from the terrace opposite. They had been in time to see it all. They left no doubt it was Misra who had done the pushing-over, the American couple had been around an angle of the terrace when it happened.

Keller didn't quit; he checked with every one of the rooms looking out on that side. And, out of all this piecework, he got the following interesting, though still obscure, sidelights:

(1.) The two Americans had not only joined in the shouting and ruckus over New York's bright lights and skyine that had aroused so many guests, but had even been the chief offenders. The woman's shrill voice had carried further than the men's, and the American Allen had more lung power than the two Malays. He had been distinctly heard to boom out: "Whoopee! that looks good after all these years!" and other similar yodels.

(2.) It was the woman who was first seen to mount the parapet to view the city better, with the American supporting her, as though setting the example for the two Malays to follow (a fact which she had carefully neglected to mention to Keller).

(3.) Both Americans were holding cigarettes in their hands, both threw them over into space just before it happened. Almost everyone had seen the twin red sparks go hurtling downward, seconds before the maharajah went over himself. A quite unnecessary bit of sloppiness, for the tiled pavement over there was perfectly good for putting them out, and they might have caused a fire on the roof below. The incident of the jewel case in the lobby came briefly to Keller's mind, he tried to connect it with these two cigarettes, failed, and it faded away again.

Not that any of this mattered. And yet maybe it did, maybe it did. For instance, why should the wife and Allen bawl their lungs out at sight of the city's spectaculars? True, they had been away for years, but the sight couldn't have been new to them. Why a young riot out on a terrace at one in the morning over it? And with the question came the improbable corollary: Did they *want* an audience? Did they in some mysterious way know ahead of time what was going to happen out there, and want as many witnesses as possible to see it? That wouldn't wash. Allen's treatment of the poor devil, the spiteful alacrity with which both had indicted him, showed it was no prearranged triple-plot, they hadn't bribed him or anything like that.

Keller, to tell the truth, did not know exactly what he was after himself. Some sort of moral complicity on their part maybe. Physical there was none. No less than six people who had seen the thing assured him neither of the two Americans had been anywhere near the doomed man. All had seen Misra, and no one else, throw him to his death.

He could hear Misra again, whimpering "Lattah me go!" and how pale they had gotten. Something Misra had done—or said—

at that precise moment, cringing away from the brass-buttoned cop along the floor, had frightened them. And cancel out "done," because the blonde's face had been hidden against the divan and she hadn't seen anything, yet had taken a hitch in her crocodile tears. So it was something he'd said. And all he'd said was "Lattah me go."

Keller went down again wishing there were some explorer, or world-traveler, or professor of languages in the hotel, to help him out on this. There weren't any, as far as he knew. There was a very good doctor living right in the house, though, way up in the money, charged all kinds of stiff prices; specialist in nervous disorders, mostly wealthy woman patients. Keller had heard he was supposed to be a very brainy man, had been all over the world. Doctors were supposed to know snatches of Latin, odds and ends of foreign languages—or so he'd been told.

On an impulse he went down there and knocked at this Dr. Stillman's door on the fifth floor, late as it was. Hell of a thing to do, but all the man could do was slam the door in his face.

The doctor had evidently been up reading; he came to the door in some kind of a Chinese smoking-jacket.

"Sorry to bust in on you. I'm the house detective," Keller came to the point directly. "Were you ever in Singapore?"

"Why, yes."

"D'you know Malay by any chance?"

Stillman was beginning to smile a little. "No, but I've got an English-Malay dictionary stuck away in my trunk somewhere. Come in and I'll get it out for you. What is it you want to know?"

"I wanna know if there's three Malay words that sound like the English words let, me, go—" began Keller, and went in and closed the door after him.

When they came out again, Stillman was dressed—not immaculately but sufficiently—and acted as if he were going places with Keller in a hurry. They rushed to the elevator.

"Pretty smart," Keller was saying, "but not smart enough. Don't ever let 'em tell you detectives haven't got a sixth sense, Doc. Something told me from the beginning—"

Jimmie's face stopped him when the slide shoved back in answer to their ring. "What's up?" Keller asked him tensely.

"Mist' Keller, they ain't been nobody down at that desk in over quartah of an hour, and it don't look right to me."

"You're damn tooting it don't look right, with all them immies in the can! Get us down there, quick!"

"Oh, them purty li'l boxes is safe," Jimmie reassured him, bearing down on the lever, "Mist' Frost done toted 'em all up to Mist' Depew's room hisself. What I don't lak is why he don't come down again; this whole hotel can't run itself.

"But Frost couldn't have gotten 'em out!" Keller was getting whiter by the minute, and it wasn't from dropping so fast in the car either. "He didn't know the combination!"

" 'Pears lak Mist' Depew musta guv it to him over the foam, he told me he axed him to bring 'em right on up."

"A fortune in jewels in an open, unguarded room? Never, not Depew! There's something phony going on here. D'you mean to say somebody'd try hijacking 'em with half the city police force chasing in and out of the building?"

"That would be about the best time, if the crooks were clever," Stillman observed ominously. "They're all busy on something else right now."

Keller bolted back to the safe. It was locked now; if it had been opened previously, it had been done legitimately, it bore no marks of tampering. Keller tried to get Depew on the desk phone; there was no answer. Then it rang back, but from one of the other rooms. A liquor-blurred voice said, "Help! There's a snake in my room! It's between me and the door and I can't get out!"

"Aw, go back to bed and sleep it off!" Keller growled disgustedly and banged up. He bared his gun in the elevator, going up to Depew's. "Did I," he muttered to no one in particular, "ever say that nothing happened on this job?"

Which must have been a come-on for more, because as the three of them dashed around the turn in the hall toward the manager's room, a man was lying there full length, distorted, lifeless. Just beyond reach of his outstretched hand was one of the jewel boxes Misra had turned over to the safe. It had opened in falling, and the floor was pebbled with uncut stones, gleaming dully. Emeralds, topazes, sapphires.

Jimmy took one horrified look, said, "Tha's one of them two who come in without nothing in their bags, right after the maharajah done got here!"

"Well, he went out with nothing, too!" Keller said grimly.

A bottle crashed somewhere in the distance, inside one of the rooms, and a drunk could be heard yelling, "Shoo! Scat! Go 'way! Go 'way, I tell ya, you ain't real at all!" Keller's mascot, riding his shoulder all this while, began to get jittery again, like he had in the lobby that time.

Keller had no time for the alcoholic d.t.'s, nor for the monkey either. He gave the manager's

closed door the pass key and darted in. Doctor Stillman stayed behind in the hall, crouched over the dead man, attentively pulling down the lower lids of the dead eyes with the ball of his thumb.

The first glance showed Depew's room empty—but with all the lights going. That was a give-away in itself, electricity bills were Depew's pet peeve. The second glance showed the phone wires neatly snipped in two. Keller dove into the bathroom, saw Frost's feet hanging down over the edge of the tub, lashed together with strips torn from the shower curtains.

Keller got the gag out of Frost's mouth, stuck around long enough to hear him pant: "Depew's in the clothes closet, get him out before he smothers!" and left him there for somebody else to finish untying.

Depew was near strangulation when Keller opened the door, but more from rage than lack of air. He had been hung by the back of his coat to a hook and left to swing his bound legs helplessly in the air. Keller lowered him, got the gag out, and again left him for somebody else.

"They came right up to my door, poked guns into me," Depew sputtered. "Made me call Frost and give him the combination. Then when he came up here with the jewels . . ."

But he was talking to himself. A shout of alarm from Stillman had dragged Keller out into the hall again. The doctor was pressed flat against the wall, hands out on either side of him, looking up and down uneasily, as though he'd just jumped back from the body.

"Look out where you go!" he said hoarsely. "This man's been bitten by a cobra! I know the signs, saw too many cases of it in the tropics! I found the puncture just now, on the back of his hand, and the poison got into his blood stream. The cobra must be still at large out here somewhere!"

Jimmie was flat against the opposite wall, petrified, quaking with terror. From that distant room at the end again came the sound of glass breaking.

"My God, that poor souse!" Keller groaned, "that's where—" and went flying down that way. Stillman, courageous enough to come after him, warned: "Careful now, they're quicker than lightning!"

The door was open a few inches, just enough to have admitted it after it had done the job out in the hall. Maybe the drunk had heard the first man's death agony and opened it. . . .

"Don't move, in there!" Keller called out warningly. "Is it near the door? I'm going to kick it open." He raised his gun, then kicked.

But the cobra was dead already. A man in pajamas was perched up on the broad window-sill, wavering drunkenly, the window

behind him wide open. Midway between him and the door, effectively blocking it, was a coiled-up black mass that resembled a woman's discarded stocking. Over it was a mound of broken bottle-glass. Keller counted five separate necks and corks. The whole thing was soaking in a cloudburst of mingled gin and whiskey that filled the room with its aroma.

Keller vaulted over it and snatched at the stew before he went over backwards through the window into eternity. The poor slob came down in his arms, crumpled, began to sob all over him.

"It's all over now, it's dead," Keller tried to reassure him.

"I ain't crying about that," the souse bawled heartbrokenly. "All my lovely, lovely liquor I hadda waste on it!"

The monkey, scared stiff at what it had spotted on the floor, had stayed with Keller, but had both little paws knotted desperately in his hair and was protesting squeakily.

"That other guy!" Keller rasped. "If he gets away with the jewels he gets sure-fire death! That maharajah wasn't so dumb. He must've put a snake in each box except that smallest one, the one with the set stones she could wear, as a sort of ready-made burglar-alarm!" He remembered what the maharajah had said in the lobby when he'd slapped Misra around: "It might have been one of the other boxes." And how willing the maharanee had been to have them put in the safe instead of being taken up with them.

They went chasing down the hall again, the released Depew with them now. "I've warned the whole crew of cops that came here on that other case," he said. "They've thrown a cordon around the building. Unless the burglar got out immediately after he got the jewel cases, he's still lurking inside some place!"

"He had to get them inside the dummy baggage him and the other guy brought in first; couldn't carry them out openly. Come on, we'll try the obvious place—the room they hired."

The uniformed cop and one of the homicide men from upstairs joined them; the thing was growing like a treasure hunt. Stillman, however, left the posse to go back to his own room for something he said he needed.

The door of the room on the second floor where Frost had put the two men was discreetly closed. They spread out around it in a fan, guns out. Keller pounded, ordered, "Come out with your hands up, or we'll blow you six ways!" There was no answer; there was a sound of someone breathing harshly, audibly as sandpaper being rubbed together. Depew had edged up sidewise, stabbed the pass-key in, jumped back again out of possible line of fire.

The door cracked back from Keller's sole.

The second hijacker was standing there in the middle of the room, his face like chalk. A Luger was dangling uselessly upside-down, hooked by the trigger to one finger. Even as they looked, it dropped off, hit the floor.

An open box was down there already, a slushy pile of twinkling diamonds and pearls strewed across his shoes. The living lightning conductor perched on Keller's shoulder began to go haywire again; he shot out backwards into the hall as the detective went in.

"Too late," the man with the white face said, sucking in his breath fearfully. "It got me." Something like a shadow flicked under the bed.

Footsteps pounded down the hall and Stillman flashed in, a wicked-looking scalpel bared in his hand. He didn't ask, must have been able to tell by the man's face. The bitten jewel thief held out his left hand. There were two blue punctures on the fleshy cushion below the thumb.

Stillman grabbed for the hand, drove him back against the wall; his back was between what he was doing and the others, his elbow went up sharply, then down again —just once. The man didn't scream, just opened his mouth convulsively, then fainted dead away against Stillman's shoulder.

"Ambulance, quick!" the latter called out without turning, "and fix up a tourniquet while we're waiting. This may buck it if it's been done soon enough."

"Better get him out in the hall, it's still around in there some place," Keller warned.

Stillman and his senseless burden managed to stagger out unattacked. The doctor's hands were shaking; the scalpel stayed behind with the jewels. Keller, on a brilliant inspiration, while the cop and city detective stood guard in the open doorway with bared guns, detached a fire-extinguisher filled with chemical from the wall nearby, aimed it at a tangent down toward the bed, and let the stuff in it fly. The hiss would have put ten of the writhing devils to shame; threads of vapor rose where it hit.

"Give it all you've got if—" he was warning the two marksmen, when something that resembled a lariat on the loose came looping viciously out into the open. It was attacking in the face of the carbon dioxide barrage. There were flashes on each side of Keller and a spate of bullets tore all over the carpet. The cobra seemed to swirl in and out around them untouched, too corkscrewy to make any kind of a target. It was coming up too fast and Keller was only human, he couldn't wait any longer. He gave a howl that would have done an Iroquois warrior credit, bounced the heavy fire-extinguisher down with both hands, and jumped

about three yards back into the hall. The others shifted likewise; this was no game in which to be front man.

The cobra never showed at the threshold after them, so they drew in close again. Then they saw that the extinguisher had stopped it pretty after all, in the manner of a steam-roller. Part of it showed on one side of it, part on the other, but neither part was going places any more.

Alongside the empty valise it had been destined for was the second jewel box from which the cobra had crawled when the thief opened it. Sudden death protecting jewels was something new to an honest American hijacker. It was too bad for them they hadn't been tipped off about the maharajah's odd little burglar-alarm when they were tipped to the jewels through the usual fingering sources.

Keller and Stillman saw the poor hijacker out on a stretcher, on his way to a stiff life-and-death struggle that should have cured his taste for other people's jewelry. Stillman had pared off the whole thumb joint, but it had kept the poison from spreading through his system and saved his life.

"Let's go up now and straighten out that other matter," Keller said.

"It almost seems trivial compared to what we've been through."

"This thing was just a heist with fireworks, helped along by the Customs people who treat maharajah's baggage with diplomatic courtesy," Keller corrected. "The other is a murder."

"Do you think there was any connection between the two?"

"I doubt it. Just a case of four minds with but a single thought —and these two lads went about it the cleaner way, at that!"

Babbling and miserable, Misra was still being held up in the tower, had not yet been hauled off to the police station, due to the interruption below, which had diverted the cops' attention. Both Allen and the maharanee were looking very bored, Keller noticed when he came in with the doctor. He felt he could correct that.

"Not that I'm trying to cop any of the limelight from you fellows," he announced to the cops, "but this specialist would like to examine the prisoner."

Stillman introduced himself, whispered something to the captain in charge, asked for the loan of one of their badges. He handed the badge to Misra. The captain planted himself in front of the quailing little brown man, who had already been cuffed around some, by the looks of him.

"If you drop that badge," Stillman thundered, "we'll beat the living daylights out of you! D'you understand?"

There were three frightened people in the room now, not just

one, Keller couldn't help noticing.

Stillman took out a cigarette, held it upright between his two fingers. "Look at me," he ordered. The Malay turned his head. Stillman promptly tossed the cigarette down at the floor. Instantly the badge had clashed down beside it, all Stillman's threats to the contrary.

There wasn't a sound in the room until Stillman spoke again. "This man," he said quietly, "has *lâtah*. He's not responsible for pushing his employer off that terrace, or for any other act he may commit. It's a nervous affliction, affecting the muscular coordination, that compels the sufferer to involuntarily imitate any action made by another—particularly of throwing the arms up, down or out."

He suddenly reached up, as toward the ceiling light. Instantly Misra's arms shot up, then dropped helplessly down again. "It's as uncontrollable," the doctor went on, with every eye in the room riveted on him, "as that bucking forward of the leg normal people have when their kneecaps are tapped."

"D'you want any further tests," Keller asked, "or has this gentleman convinced you? Far be it from me to tell you boys how to run your business, but I have six eye-witnesses living in this hotel who will testify they saw this man criminally incited to throw his master over by these two people calling to him, then throwing their cigarettes over. You don't arrest the gun or knife that is the instrument of a murder, you arrest the hand and brain that wielded them. This poor devil is no more guilty than I am. They knew better than try it in Malaya—the disease is well-known there—so they lured the maharajah and his jewels, and their instrument, Misra, six thousand miles away to where the setup was more favorable to them."

"There's a famous case," Doctor Stillman said, "of a woman who had *lâtah* and who was incited by her lover into throwing her child overboard. In Malaya I've seen an old man suddenly imitate the spinning wheels of a passing bicycle until he fell exhausted. Little boys in Malaya pretend to dip their hands in fire just to see some poor *lâtah* sufferer do likewise. It's—"

"Any court in the country will find them the real murderers," Keller interrupted, "since they must have known ahead of time he was suffering from this disease. And I'm willing to testify they did, in person. They both got white when he said something in broken English that sounded like the name of the disease, when he started saying, 'Lattah—me go.' It was the keystone of their whole frame-up, they were afraid he was going to give it away—"

"Take your hand off me!" Allen snarled at one of the dicks.

"Never mind, Bud," the wom-

an said harshly, as they were led toward the door, "I'll get a good lawyer that'll knock this screwy fairy tale of his into a cocked hat!"

"You'd better get a good doctor too," Stillman mentioned ironically, "We'll see if *my* testimony has any weight in court!"

"And whether you get six months or six years," Keller added, "you don't get those rocks. When the State's through with them, I'm gonna see they go back to Singapore for the maharajah's other twenty-two wives."

Downstairs in the lobby afterwards, when he got back from the police station where they'd been taken and held without bail, a chattering projectile flew from Jimmie's shoulder to his.

"So they went off and forgot you, did they?" Keller said. "I guess I'll have to adopt you. You're a Yank now."

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traynor's cipher

by . . . Edward D. Hoch

He had been dead for hours before they threw his body in the Bay. He'd obviously died out on Drew's Island.

"THEY just fished Pete Traynor's body out of Biscayne Bay."

Tom Fordney cursed softly. "He was a good man, but the people we're after are smarter."

The dark, stocky man across the desk from Tom sighed.

Tom walked over to the window and gazed out over the buildings. Across the city, the Washington monument reached upward through the early-morning mist. He stood there for several minutes in silence.

Finally he turned back and said, "Tell me about it, again."

The other man consulted a notebook and spoke quietly, "Peter Traynor, of the Miami office, first made contact with Axel Drew about three months ago. For security reasons, we had no direct contact, although we did learn that he reached the island . . ."

Tom held up a hand to stop him. "We have no idea as to the location of the island?"

"Only that it's within a few hundred miles off the Florida coast. Traynor was last seen boarding Axel Drew's yacht, which sailed due east into the Atlantic."

Edward Hoch, who is with an advertising agency in Rochester, N. Y., turns to a part of the country generally identified with a red-haired and indestructible private eye who obviously can't cope with all *the mayhem in the Miami area. Hoch, increasingly well known in the field, is now working on a novel.*

Tom lit a cigarette and sighed. "There's a thousand islands out there. Drew's headquarters might be on any one of them. The clearing-house for all the secret information those rats steal, from the factories and research laboratories and government files! Almost everything they can get their hands on ends up on that island. From there, it's easy to ship the stuff out the rest of the way."

The other man glanced at his watch. "We'd better get over to the lab. They're flyin' Pete's stuff in from Miami this morning."

"O.K."

They left the squat brownstone building and walked two blocks east to their destination. . . .

Pete Traynor had been only twenty-nine when he reached Axel Drew's island and found death. He had been dead for several hours before his body was thrown into Biscayne Bay, which led to the conclusion that he had died on the island and been taken back to Miami to divert suspicion.

The few belongings Traynor had kept in a run-down apartment while contacting Drew were flown to Washington within a few hours after the body was found.

Tom Fordney surveyed the collection of tattered clothing, the worn suitcase, and the rest of it. His eyes strayed to a large water-color painting: a fantastic picture of eight strands of rope of various colors, hanging over a wet rock.

"What's that thing?" he wanted to know.

"Painting. Done in the last few days," one of the lab men replied. "They say Traynor was interested in art. Don't know what this is supposed to be, though. Eight colored ropes hanging on a rock!"

"Find anything on the clothes?"

The man frowned. "There were particles of sand in the pants cuffs. Nothing else."

"They must have discovered who he was and . . ."

"But he must have been on the island for several days," one of the others reasoned. "He'd try to leave something to give us the location of the island."

Tom shook his head. "We had no prearranged code."

"This picture might mean something. Pete was interested in art, but not enough to spend his time painting while on an important case."

Tom agreed with the speaker. He had never met Pete Traynor, but if the picture had been painted recently, there was a good chance it contained some clue to the island's location.

"What day was it that Traynor left Miami on the yacht?" he asked the man with the notebook.

"Just a week ago."

Tom turned to the lab man. "Could you state definitely that this painting was done within the past week?"

The short man in the white

coat picked up the painting and once more carefully examined the pigments. Finally he told them, "It was done very recently. Certainly less than a week ago."

"Then he painted it while on the island. Drew must have brought it back and returned it to Traynor's room with the rest of the stuff. They probably didn't realize its importance." Right now, he didn't realize it either.

The lab man—Tom remembered that his name was Herm—took the picture into the photography room. "If there's anything written on here, the ultraviolet or the infra-red should bring it out."

"Yeah. . . ."

But, an hour later, nothing had been found. Tom, his assistant, and Herm, the lab technician, had gone over the clothes and the painting; there was no message.

"If there is one, it must be the painting itself," Tom decided.

"There's no well-known code or cipher using colors, though."

The wet rock in the picture suggested an island to Tom. He was certain that something . . . "Those eight colored strands of rope: that must be it. He thought they would mean something to us."

"A code, spelling out the name of the island?"

"Might be. Let's see; what are those colors? In order."

Lou started calling them out. "From left to right, there's red—what's this next one—?"

"I think it's indigo."

"Well then, red, indigo, orange, black, indigo, blue, red, and yellow."

Tom puzzled over the colors he had written on a large pad. Suddenly, "Look! The first letter of each color! R-I-O-B-I-B-R-Y."

"RIO BIBRY! Sounds Spanish. 'Rio' means 'river.' What's 'bibry' mean in English?"

Tom thought back to the two years of Spanish he'd studied in school. "I don't think there's any such word. I'll check."

After a fast phone call to the Library of Congress, Tom gave them the bad news. "No such word as 'bibry' or 'riobibry' in Spanish or English. And no island by that name off the Florida coast or anywhere else in the world. Now what?"

Lou grunted. . . .

Red, indigo, orange, black, indigo, blue, red, yellow.

After twelve hours of endless working over Vigenere tables, inverted alphabets and shifting ciphers, they were near exhaustion.

"There's no hidden name in that," Tom Fordney finally decided. "Are you sure we've got the colors right?"

Herm put down his cigarette. "Yeah, that's what they're supposed to be. All simple colors, except the indigo. But that's one of the seven colors of the spectrum, so I suppose . . ."

Tom brought his fist down on the table. "Of course! Seven colors of the spectrum, plus black and white, make nine colors! Traynor was interested in art, so he thought we'd think of the colors of the spectrum. And the picture itself told us what to look for. If that rock represents an island, then what would the lines represent, running vertically down the painting? Only one thing, and that tells us which of those islands is Axel Drew's headquarters . . ."

The Coast Guard launch was cutting through the waves a hundred miles off the Florida coast. Ahead of them, to the east, a new sun was rising on a new day.

Tom Fordney gripped the machine gun tightly under his arm and watched a tiny island grow gradually larger.

"We've got the island surrounded, and two planes are closing in. I hope this is the right one, Tom."

Tom turned to the speaker. "This is it. That painting was supposed to represent a map or chart, the colored ropes being lines of longitude. He couldn't make it too obvious, but he wanted us to get the idea."

"But where did you get this position?"

"From the colors: the spectrum is composed of seven colors; red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. If you put black at the beginning (the absence of color), and white at the end (the combination of all colors), you have nine of them. If you let each color stand for the numbers one through nine in order, you have black equal to one, red is two, orange is three, and so on, up to white-nine."

"But that gives you nothing for zero," the man objected.

Tom glanced at the island through a pair of binoculars. There was no movement on it yet. "Traynor didn't need a zero to give the approximate location of this island. And when I saw that his cipher gave a location about where we figured their headquarters were, I ordered the boats out. Let's see: those colors were red, indigo, orange, black, indigo, blue, red, and yellow. That gives us 27317624."

"But what does it mean? How does it tell us this is Axel Drew's island?"

Instead of answering, Tom turned to the Coast Guard officer. "What's our position now?"

"Latitude: twenty-seven degrees, thirty-one minutes north. Longitude: seventy-six degrees, twenty-four minutes west. . . ."

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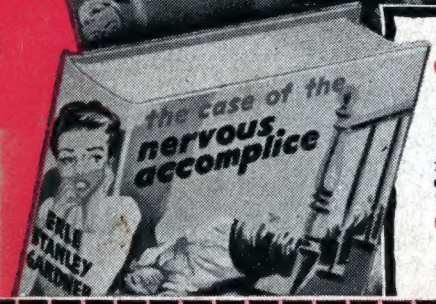

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